

THE IMPACT OF HIGH-STAKES ACCOUNTABILITY ON
INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND
DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING

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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation
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**THE IMPACT OF HIGH-STAKES ACCOUNTABILITY
ON INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING**

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And hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative, multi-case study was designed to examine the impact high-stakes accountability and data-driven decision making has had on administrators and teacher leaders. Serving as the conceptual framework, instructional leadership theory is defined as a multitude of relationships, behaviors, and responsibilities that directly impact student achievement (O'Donnell & White, 2005; Bottoms & Fry, 2009). The researcher utilized instructional leadership theory as lens to explore the participants' thoughts, feelings and perceptions with respect to the implementation of these tenets (Mertens, 2005). The focus of this study is to analyze how administrators and educators are directly responsible for students' performances and with the rigors of accountability from the principles of NCLB, educators are having to turn to new approaches such as data-driven decision making (King, 2002) and quick-paced instruction to meet the needs of students.

A qualitative multi-case study approach allowed the researcher to examine how principals and teachers were affected by tenets of the *No Child Left Behind Act* and high-stakes accountability (Creswell, 2007). For this research study, four single cases (i.e., individual subjects) as well as four focus groups (containing 5-7 participants) were selected to "capture multiple realities" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 72) and open-ended, emerging data (Creswell, 2003). Through data analysis, three themes emerged: 1) *Changing Culture*, with a subtheme of Collaboration; and 2) *Changing Evidence* with subthemes of Data-Driven Input and Purposeful Goals; and 3) *Increased Rigor* with subthemes of Aggressive Pace and Performance and Individualized Instruction. These themes provide an understanding of the impact high-stakes accountability and data-driven decision making has had on public school principals and educators.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Study

Background

Education has taken on a dramatic change over the course of the last decade. In January of 2002, the face of the American education system changed with the enactment of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (*NCLB*, 2001), which mandated public school effectiveness and student proficiency. As more emphasis was placed on school districts across the nation based on the tenets of *NCLB*, national standards began to change and accountability became more rigorous (Standerfer, 2006). Guthrie and Springer (2004) commented, “...the goals of education in the United States have been redefined. The way we measure success has shifted. And the ways we think about improving schools have changed” (p. 24).

Accountability is not new to education in the United States, as the poignant criticism of public education started in the 1960s when it was noted that American students were leaving school without the skills needed to be successful citizens (Popham, 2001; Stiggins, 1999). With global successes such as the launch of the Russian satellite, Sputnik, reforms resulted and stricter math and science competencies were included in graduation requirements (Cuban, 2004). As a result, there was a demand for the development of testing in all core curriculums to guarantee that students had learned (Cuban, 2009; Resnick, 1980). For the first time, commercially developed standardized tests were created to provide local accountability (Stiggins, 1999). This desire for high-stakes testing sparked the *Elementary and Secondary Educational Act of 1965* which was implemented to diagnose and monitor gaps in student learning (Hayes, 2008). Consequently, with the assistance of the newly created standardized achievement tests,

educational practices were carefully scrutinized with the intent of managing any instructional gaps (Koretz, 2002).

During the 1970s, educators in individual states took on the task of eliminating deficits in student competencies, resulting in statewide testing (Linn, 2000; Resnick, 1980). Initially, there were three states that began statewide achievement testing; however, by the end of the decade, popularity of high-stakes testing had grown until at least 40 states had some sort of large-scale multiple choice test (Koretz, 2002; Stiggins, 1999).

As public education entered the decade of the 1980s, standardized assessment was at the forefront of educational reform (Stiggins, 2001). To create an environment where student outcomes were revered, the public turned attention to the role of principals, who were no longer regarded as managers but as instructional leaders. Edmonds (1979) coined the term *instructional leader*, when he alleged strong administrative leadership was a leading characteristic of a successful school. Principals were called to lead the school's instruction and focus on student outcomes (Stewart, 2006). Immediately, the nation was engrossed with school reform as a result of the federal government release of *A Nation at Risk* (Hayes, 2008). This report from the National Commission on Excellence in Education asserted students were outperformed on international academic tests by students from other industrial countries (Kahlenberg, 2008; Thattai, 2001). Consequently, the federal government began intervening in local education policy and as Hallinger (1992) noted it was no longer acceptable for principals to be school managers. In order to meet the accountability requirements in American education, principals were expected to become instructional leaders (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982). Murphy (1990)

described instructional leaders as “strong, directive leaders who had been successful at turning their schools around” (¶14) and noted that principals in productive schools where quality teaching and learning existed, employed instructional leadership strategies. Increased federal requirements that monitored student growth stirred an accountability culture (Firestone, 2009). Principals became involved in the teaching and learning process and the focus on effective instructional leadership began (Beck & Murphy, 1993; Hallinger & Murphy, 1987).

By the 1990s, reports concerning additional overseas testing were circulated daily. Throughout America, public schools became deeply involved in international testing and the focus was once again on the declining scores of American students (Stiggins, 1999; 2002). Consequently, President George H. W. Bush fashioned an educational summit to address the nation’s scholastic decline. Through the knowledge gained at these conferences, learning through “standards and accountability” became the major focus of education (Sloane & Kelley, 2003). After the reauthorization of *The Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001*, President George W. Bush signed into law the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* mandating standardized testing for every student in the United States in math and reading (Linn, 2003; Marzano, Pickering, & McTighe, 1993; NCLB, 2001). The focus of these accountability assessments was not solely on minimal competencies but on challenging standards that every child must demonstrate growth and mastery (Kahlenberg, 2008).

As Aldridge (2003) conjectured,

Achieving these goals (AYP) is challenging, as the rigor of tests, content standards, and performance standards vary greatly from state to state, and each

state has a different starting point. The authors present data revealing the volatility of gains in achievement from year to year. Nevertheless, all states are expected to meet the same target of 100 percent proficiency within 12 years (p. 46).

The standards set by *NCLB* were considered lofty and those in the education arena were challenged by the strict requirements. “No state, or county for that matter, is close to meeting the high standards set for proficient performance on NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) or similar standards on many state assessments” (Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2002, p. 4). This accountability component of *NCLB* was accomplished through the use of standardized state testing and the reporting of such tests to the public. Sanctions, as in limiting federal funding, were imposed on school districts that could not prove the academic success of their students. This success was measured through disaggregated data and determined whether or not a school had met AYP on state assessments (*NCLB*, 2001). Rentner, Chudowsky, Faga, Gayler, Hamilton, and Kober, (2003), argued that the nation’s schools should improve through the use of these yearly tests in all states, which included annual increased accountability with the goal of all students on grade level by 2014. Though the goal of *NCLB* was imposing, the focus on accountability for every child was established and school districts began to take measures to meet the requirements expected by 2014 (Hayes, 2008; Sunderman, 2007). Each individual state was left accountable for the success of its students. For the first time, there were limited to no modifications available for subgroups such as low income students, minorities, and certain members with special education diagnoses. All students were expected to show growth and all schools were expected to meet adequate yearly progress (Kahlenberg, 2008; Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2001). As a direct result of

NCLB, accountability became the main focus of educators and administrators across the nation, creating a high-stakes environment.

Though reform change is not new to educators, the comprehensive effect of so many policy demands at such a fast pace led to a change in the teacher's role (Valli, & Buese, 2007). "Changes in expectations for teachers' roles have been particularly striking over the two decades of educational reform that led to the high-stakes accountability climate teachers now experience" (Valli & Buese, 2007, p. 520). Combine changing roles with *NCLB*'s expectation that teachers remain highly qualified (*NCLB*, 2001), and unintended consequences may occur (Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, & Harrington, 2014).

To comply with the federal reform of *NCLB*, the state of Missouri opted to administer the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). Required under Senate Bill 380, the MAP established competencies to ensure success for all Missouri students. Though mandated state testing was not new to Missouri, the consequences of failure raised the stakes resulting in higher accountability for school districts (Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2002). Historically, Missouri educators had used such achievement tests as the *Basic Essentials Skills Test* (BEST) and the *Missouri Mastery and Achievement Test* (MMAT) (Baker, 1989). Although these early attempts at standardized testing provided the state with the assessment information it needed to fund federal education programs, not until the implementation of *NCLB*, was the data for standardized state testing extensively analyzed based on the achievement of subgroups of student population (Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000).

There are many educational reforms that have tried to influence student achievement; however, even with the variety of available alternatives, none of these

approaches have been unsurpassed. Accordingly, Owens and Valesky (2011) stated, “...efforts to improve the performance of schools have produced not widespread agreement as to how to bring about improvement, but a frustratingly broad array of very different concepts, proposals, and programs, some of which are in conflict” (p. 5). The research from the National Education Assessment Program (NAEP), also known as the Nation’s Report Card, shows that even though improvements have been made since *NCLB* was enacted, the improvements in math and reading were actually greater prior to this rigid accountability process (FairTest, 2009).

However, by employing quality leadership within school settings, success can be achieved. Leadership gives purpose to conflict and starts evolutionary change (Jacobs & Jacques, 1990; Schein, 1992). Additionally, instructional leaders not only provide input concerning how to raise achievement, but diagnose issues and suggest solutions (Blase & Blase, 1999; Reitzug, 1997).

In this chapter, the problem and purpose of this inquiry will be presented, along with the research questions posed. In addition the conceptual framework will be discussed and a brief overview of the design and methodology and definitions will guide the inquiry.

Statement of the Problem

NCLB has changed the standard practices of instructional leaders with an emphasis on federal funding attached to high-stakes testing resulting in both principal and teacher leaders feeling compelled to raise student achievement using any appropriate measures necessary (Bottoms & Fry, 2009). To illustrate, Firestone (2009) stated, “...the rise of the accountability movement...has brought about an accountability culture in

many school districts..." (p. 671). However, there is disagreement regarding this reform, as those that support high-stakes testing believe education can be vastly improved through the use of rewards and sanctions based on students' performance on standardized tests (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2006; Raymond & Hanushek, 2003), while others believe the use of this drastic accountability will create unintended effects on all facets of education (Jones, Jones & Hargrove, 2003; Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2006). Because of the high-stakes accountability pressure associated with *NCLB*'s sanctions, Pedulla, Abrams, Madaus, Russell, Ramos, and Miao (2003) had concerns about how instructional practices would be affected. Their fear was that instructional leadership would shift from developing research based best practices to one that conforms into a school culture focused solely on achievement scores. Mandinach, Honey and Light (2006) commented, "...one consequence of the standards and accountability movement is that...administrators are being asked to think very differently about educational decision making, and are being asked to use data to inform everything from resource allocation to instructional practices" (p. 3). Conversely, leaders in the field of instructional leadership highlighted as a result of the *NCLB* mandates, need to change how they demonstrate instructional leadership. The challenge is, as Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, and Thomas (2007) described,

...the press for data-driven decision making, then, is not a call for schools to begin to use data, but a challenge for leaders to reshape the central practices and cultures of their school to react intentionally to the new kinds of data provided by accountability systems (p. 8).

As a result of the myriad of opinions on how to meet the challenges of high-stakes accountability reform legislation such as *NCLB*, an investigation was warranted that explores how such legislation, with its high stake accountability, has changed the role of instructional leaders. In addition, the impact that high stake accountability reform has had on data-driven decision making within school settings was examined.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study was to examine how the role of the instructional leader has been impacted as a result of high-stakes testing accountability and to examine data-driven decision making within schools as a result of the reform. A qualitative multi-case study design was selected in order for the researcher to investigate how high-stakes testing has altered the role of the principal and teachers. As there is an abundance of information on accountability (Firestone, 2009; Guthrie & Springer, 2004; Hansen, Gentry, & Dalley, 2003), data-driven research (Bedwell, 2004; Firestone, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas, 2005) and instructional leadership (Blase & Blase, 1999; Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas; O'Donnell & White, 2005; Reitzug, 1997), it is the intention of the researcher to filter through the data, investigate the role of instructional leaders, and determine whether or not high-stakes testing has influenced the actions and behavior of the principal and teachers. O'Donnell and White (2005) noted, "...although numerous studies have investigated the relationship between the instructional leadership behaviors of principals and student achievement, most have not been conducted in an environment as politically driven as the current assessment-based educational system" (p. 2). The ultimate goal of the research is to create an "in-depth picture of the case" regarding the impact of high-stakes testing on the instructional leader (Creswell, 2007, p. 132).

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study in examining how high-stakes accountability testing has influenced the role of educators.

- (1) How has the issue of accountability, as framed by *NCLB*, impacted the role of elementary principals as instructional leaders?
- (2) How has the issue of accountability, as framed by *NCLB*, impacted the role of teachers as instructional leaders?
- (3) In what ways, if any, do educators perceive high-stakes accountability as being influential in decision making, curriculum selection, and school goals?
- (4) What, if any, are some of the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing as perceived by principals and teachers?

Conceptual Framework

As the educational *NCLB* reform movement gained more attention, effective leadership held precedence for improving student achievement (Bottoms & Fry, 2009). The theoretical underpinning for this study was based on the premise that the leader, whether in the role as a principal or a teacher in an educational setting, could indirectly influence student performance which would promote lasting educational change (DuFour & Marzano, 2009; Firestone, 2009). Leadership, as a theoretical framework, is defined as an "...intentional influence [that] is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization" (Yukl, 2006, p. 3). Rauch and Behling (1984) concurred, "...leadership is the process of influencing the activities of an organized group toward goal achievement" (p. 46). With

the implementation of high-stakes assessments across the country, it is important to remember that leadership plays a primary role in the success of that implementation. “Leadership has been, and will continue to be, a major focus in the era of school accountability and school restructuring” (Stewart, 2006, ¶3). Leaders want to influence reform and, as a result, they pursue innovative outlets to help them increase student achievement. Two leadership theories were considered for this study concerning high-stakes accountability and data-driven instruction and their impact on the school leadership: Bass’ (1985, 1996) theory of transformational leadership and Mintzberg’s (1973) managerial model filtered into Blasé and Blasé’s (1999, 2000) instructional leadership theory.

Organizational goals and initiatives are significant in times of accountability and whether these goals impact performance can sometimes depend upon the people leading the change (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). As transformational leaders have been found to possess the characteristics of charisma, enthusiasm, and the ability to inspire vision, they are often given administrative positions in schools experiencing significant change or needing a spark. These leaders empower their followers to rise to the occasion and as a result, transformational leaders are successful in schools and businesses that are low performing or lack morale (Bass, 1985, 1986; Eisenbeiß, & Boerner, 2013; Kokemuller, 2014). Yet, Kokemuller (2014) argued that transformational leadership falls short when the leaders focus entirely on the big picture and neglects the details. “Overreliance on enthusiasm can restrict the transformational leader's willingness to delve into research, study, and logical reasoning” (Kokemuller, 2014, ¶4). Working with children involves more than mere enthusiasm. Details and data inquiry are the main-frame of not only

NCLB but the high-stakes testing accountability era (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011). Though useful in times of change, the absence of detail-oriented thinking in the transformational model creates disconnect between the purpose and framework of this study.

On the other hand, managerial leadership, a focus on function, tasks, and behaviors (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999), has been a necessity for school leaders as “...school principals are the front-line managers, the small business executives, the team leaders charged with leading their faculty to new levels of effectiveness.” They are “...expected to demonstrate bottom-line results” (Hess & Kelly, 2007, pg. 2). Yet, in 1975, Mintzberg contended that the job pressures, day-to-day interruptions, mundane tasks and the expediency that each of these disruptions requires guarantees superficial actions. Consequently, with the implications of high-stakes accountability, administrators have expanded their leadership role to be more than a manager by focusing on teaching and learning, staff development, data-driven decision making, and accountability (King, 2002).

Though theoretical underpinnings such as transformational leadership and managerial leadership have value within the school setting and are considered to be beneficial when discussing high-stakes accountability, each of these leadership methods is reliant upon the skills of the participants. Whether it is relying on the expertise or the commitment of others, change will not occur unless the participants are willing to allow the change (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; West Chester University of Pennsylvania, 2010). Conversely, instructional leadership is dependent upon the expertise of the leader, whether a principal leader or a teacher leader.

Ubben and Hughes (2011) defined instructional leadership as a shared leadership process where the educational leader is the “...facilitator of the process.” Ultimately, the instructional leader is the “...apex of learning” (p. 29). This rational affirmed the theory of instructional leadership as the most appropriate conceptual framework for this study due to transformational theory’s lack of detail-oriented decision making and managerial theory’s substantial focus on daily tasks.

NCLB formally identified the principal as the instructional leader of the school (*No Child Left Behind Executive Summary*, 2001). Instructional leadership is the compilation of an effective leader directing an organization to implement change efforts. O’Donnell and White (2005) believed, “...by identifying the strength of the relationships between specific [leader] behaviors and student achievement, educational leaders and politicians will gain a more accurate understanding of the leadership behaviors necessary to improve student performance” (p. 3). Teachers, parents, and students look to the principal for answers when it comes to accountability (Bottoms & Fry, 2009). Due to the rigorous demands of high-stakes testing, educational leaders are directly responsible for the student’s performance in their schools. Green (2010) believed, “...leaders are faced with challenges of meeting standards, becoming effective instructional leaders, and assuming responsibility for managing the organization in a manner that facilitates the academic achievement of all students in attendance” (p. 5). Though it is quality instructional leadership that assists educators in meeting the challenges of high-stakes accountability, the role of the instructional leader is changing as a direct result of educational reform (Normore & Brooks, 2012).

President Obama (2009) conjectured:

From the moment students enter a school, the most important factor in their success is not the color of their skin or the income of their parents, it's the person standing at the front of the classroom... America's future depends on its teachers (¶24).

There has been a recent shift in the expectations of teachers, some positive and some negative. Smylie and Denney (1990), observed that this shift has increased the importance of teacher leaders, the available roles for teacher leaders, and how teacher leaders are impacting reform. Furthermore, teachers are critical to educational reform as they know the issues in education, appreciate the culture of the school setting, and understand what is needed to sustain achievement (Paulu & Winters, 1998; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Instructional leadership does not begin and end with the principal but extends to any willing school leader that focuses on instructional practices, collaboration, and the examination of research-based initiatives to improve student achievement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Noyce, Perda, and Traver (2000) suggested, "...any district can expect gains in student achievement over time when it becomes data-driven" (p. 56). This approach is gaining popularity as it is believed that instruction should be based on quality decisions, or viable facts, and therefore all instruction should be based upon the collection of assessment information (Bedwell, 2004; Hansen, Gentry, & Dalley, 2003; Hill, 1998; Skalski & Romero, 2011). As with any proposal to comply with the *NCLB* mandate, there are consequences. Since data-driven instruction has been introduced to rectify the accountability issue; the focus on instructional leadership has been altered (Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas, 2007; Skalski, & Romero, 2011). Educational leaders have

expanded their focus to various tasks such as data-driven decision making, accountability, and professional development (King, 2002). Yet, Hallinger (2005) noted that since the turn of the century, this focus on accountability, and therein the implementation of data, has stimulated the interest of instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2005). Altered or not, it is necessary for leaders to focus on instructional practices as it pertains to the accountability of student achievement. As Green (2010) stated, "...during this period of standards-based accountability, instructional leadership has been elevated to the top of the school leader's agenda" (p. 157).

Design of the Study

This research study was a problem of practice analyzing how principals and teachers are facing changes in their roles due to high-stakes accountability. When choosing a design and method, Creswell (2007) stated, "...a qualitative research study is a form of inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand" (p. 39). Qualitative studies help the researcher understand what the participants feel, think, and believe with respect to the topic being studied (Mertens, 2005). This type of research encourages participants to speak for themselves and provides them with an outlet to express their own perspectives. For that reason, qualitative research is an interactive progression in which the participants teach the researcher about their lives (Hughes, 1988). Sherman and Webb (1988) commented, "...qualitative [research] implies a direct concern with experience as it is 'lived' or 'felt' or 'undergone'" (p. 10). Qualitative research is the most effective form of inquiry to develop an in-depth understanding of how high-stakes testing has altered the role of the instructional leader as viewed through the voices of teachers and principals. By selecting a multi-case study, it

was the intent of the researcher to provide a “...detailed description of each case and...a thematic analysis across the cases called a cross-case analysis” (Mertens, 2005, p. 75).

The researcher attempted to use a socialist constructivist lens to discover if multiple realities existed. In addition, the multi-case study enabled the researcher to extract details from the perspectives of the participants by using various sources of data. These sources were important when finding the common themes of this multi-case study. The researcher, through interviews, focus groups, observations, and reviewing of documents, provided “...a voice for the[se] participants” (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). The researcher investigated how high-stakes accountability such as *NCLB* has changed the life of each participant. Through “...thick description,” the researcher intended to determine whether these instructional leaders had been influenced by data crunching and the consequences of accountability (Mertens, 2005, p. 256).

Limitations

While research designs that regulate or account for the negative influence of extraneous variables help guarantee that the study results are both valid and reliable, unfortunately, limitations may still exist (Baron, 2009). As this qualitative narrative study was limited to public administrators that have been in a principalship prior to 2006 and public school teachers that have been educators prior to 2006, the lack of diverse populations may inhibit the findings. Moreover, the research was limited as this study was conducted at the end of the school year which might have had an impact on the results from the interviews and focus groups. Finally, the researcher, as an active educator, has been affected by high-stakes accountability and data-driven instruction.

Assumptions

This study assumed participants were forthright in their response as they answered the questions and shared their reflections concerning change. In order to ensure the participant's voice was not misinterpreted by the researcher's bias of having experienced change from high-stakes accountability, the participant's opinion was clearly stated through the use of direct quotes and dialect (Creswell, 2007). In addition, it was assumed that the sample groups chosen for the study were a valid representation of suburban schools throughout the state of Missouri.

Design Controls

This research attempted to provide purposeful sampling, "...deliberately seeking a variety of opinions on controversial topics and a variety of levels of allegiance to the formal organization" (Mertens, 2005, p. 322). As a result of studying this event, knowledge was gained concerning how instructional leaders play a changing role in accountability and decision making. The strategies for data collection consisted of interviews with suburban, elementary principals who have worked in this role for at least eight years (pre-post *NCLB*), focus groups with teacher leaders that have been in an elementary setting for at least eight years (pre-post *NCLB*), observations at each school setting, and document analysis. Although this sample will not statistically represent the vast number of principals and teachers available, the sample can be defended as valid as the participants were chosen according to a purposeful sampling process (Mertens, 2005). To guarantee credibility, Mertens (2005) suggested use of the following criteria: "peer debriefing, member checks, and triangulation" (p. 358). Therefore, the researcher took every measure to include these strategies. Through deep and meaningful questions, the

researcher challenged his or her belief system. Steps were taken to provide the participants opportunity for input on the interviews and dialogue. Finally, the researcher attempted to establish a causal relationship by exploring rival explanations as researchers should attempt to employ as many research strategies as possible, thereby enhancing credibility and reducing bias (Mertens, 2005).

Definition of Key Terms

The definitions of key terms used in this investigation were provided to offer clarity and to help the reader comprehend core concepts of the study.

Accountability. The idea of holding schools, districts, educators, and students responsible for results (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2004)

Data-driven instruction. How a teacher uses the results from multiple types of student assessments to plan additional instruction. Research has shown this improves student achievement (Thompson, 2010).

Instructional leader. A concentrated involvement in curricular and instructional issues that directly affect student achievement (Cotton, 2003)

High-quality teacher. A public school teacher that has full certification, has earned a bachelor's degree, and has demonstrated competence in the core subject knowledge and the field of teaching (NICHCY, 2009).

High-stakes testing. Any test that is used to make decisions concerning educational accountability usually based upon federal or state efforts to ensure student success. Results from high-stakes testing can determine sanctions, funding, accolades, and compensation (Abbott & Terrell, 2013).

Large school district. For the purpose of this study, a large school district was defined as one that had an enrollment of five thousand or more students. (Akert, 2009).

Leadership. Faculty members who provide direction and guidance in order to achieve the school's goals in a collaborative atmosphere (Barth, 2001a).

Mid-sized school district. For the purpose of this study, a mid-sized school district was defined as one that had an enrollment between 1,000 and 5,000 students (Akert, 2009).

Principal leadership. Through strategic development, this leadership position can take cues from many different leadership theories such as authoritative leadership and distributed leadership. (Andrews & Crowther, 2002). "...educational visionaries; instructional and curriculum leaders..." (NAESP, 2013).

School improvement. An initiative used for innovation focusing on change and problem-solving in educational practice to raise student achievement (Creemers, Stoll, Reezigt, & the ESI Team, 2007).

Reform. The demand used for change with a goal of improving education and closing the persistent achievement differences between groups of students (Silver, 2004).

Small school district. For the purpose of this study, a small school district was defined as one that had an enrollment lower than 1,000 students (Akert, 2009).

Standards. Concise, written descriptions of what students are expected to know and be able to do at a specific stage of their education (Abbott & Terrell, 2013).

Teacher leadership. Educators that work with peers for the purpose of improving teaching and learning and join the principal to achieve the school's goals (Andrews & Crowther, 2002).

Summary

American education has changed due to the federal reform known as *NCLB* (Smydo, 2006). Through the implementation of mandated state testing, districts have been held accountable for student achievement. Though leaders in the field cannot agree on how to ensure student achievement, it is agreed that quality leadership has played a role in the success of high-stakes testing. Instructional leadership was found to be particularly powerful in aiding school success; however, due to the pressure of using data to drive instruction, the role of the instructional leader has been altered.

The purpose of this study was to examine how the role of the instructional leader has been impacted due to the accountability of high-stakes testing. A qualitative multi-case study design was selected in order for the researcher to investigate how high-stakes testing altered this role. Through the use of a qualitative multi-case study, the researcher posed four research questions dealing with how the accountability of high-stakes testing has influenced change. Using the conceptual framework of instructional leadership for principals and teachers, the researcher conducted focus groups, interviews, and observations, while examining pertinent documents to find common themes.

The intention of this study was to further the body of knowledge by investigating beliefs and feelings from both principals and teacher leaders concerning the implementation of *NCLB* mandates. Moreover, the researcher examined the impact of high-stakes testing on data-driven decision making.

In Chapter Two, the outcome of an expansive literature review search is provided which focused on the following: (a) accountability in education, (b) the theory of

leadership, (c) the theory of instructional leadership, (d) accountability and the changing role of the instructional leader, and (e) accountability and the changing role of the teacher leader. A description of the research design and methodology will be presented in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four the presentation and analysis of data with findings are presented with the conclusions and recommendations for future research described in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Related Literature

Introduction

Proponents of rigorous educational accountability believe the quality of American education can be greatly enhanced by rewarding and sanctioning schools according to their academic performance (Gray, 2009; Nichols & Glass, 2006; Raymond & Hanushek, 2003). Nichols and Glass (2006) offered an overview describing the major requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* : 1) all states must identify academic standards, 2) states must create an assessment to prove progression toward the standards, 3) yearly report cards must aggregate and disaggregate by student subgroups, 4) the report card information must annually be presented to the public, 5) states must devise a yearly progressive plan that will ensure a 100 percent proficiency for all students by 2014 (Adequate Yearly Progress or AYP), and 6) states will create an accountability system of rewards and sanctions tied to AYP (p. 4). This legislation specifically focused on the success of every student through mandated, high-stakes testing, highly qualified teachers, and a myriad of other educational initiatives (Kahlenberg, 2008; Sunderman, 2008). In addition, researchers have found there is no one way to approach this reform movement (Black & Wiliam, 2001; Firestone, 2009; Ivey & Fisher, 2005; Stewart, 2006), however, one issue is prevalent; teachers are turning to school leaders for the necessary instructional leadership needed to raise student achievement (Fullan, 2002). This has resulted in a change of expectations for the role and responsibility of educators, not only in the way teachers are teaching but in the way principals are being asked to lead (Firestone, 2009; O'Donnell & White, 2005).

Gray (2009) pointed out that school leaders have a new set of responsibilities: using data to make curricular decisions, meeting with teachers about the use of such data, and providing leadership with the hopes of increasing student achievement. As a result of these additional responsibilities resulting from the tenets of *NCLB*, unintentionally or not, the role of the administrator as an instructional leader has been redefined (Gray, 2009). In addition, due to school reform, principals need to recognize the necessity of teacher leadership, if the schools are to improve (Barth, 2001a). Where principals encourage teacher leadership, Davies (2005) suggested, student achievement improves in schools. Therefore, to understand the changing role of educational leaders due to reform initiatives, it is important to examine the literature related to *NCLB*, high-stakes accountability, and its effect on leadership. In this chapter, the researcher will review available literature pertaining to high-stakes testing and the changing role of the principal and teachers. In addition, the theoretical framework of leadership will be investigated, creating a justification for the use of instructional leadership theory as the conceptual framework.

As national reform has a long lineage, the literature review will begin with a historical perspective of accountability initiatives and a timeline of the various challenges that American education has faced in the last 50 years. From the *Elementary and Secondary Educational Act of 1965* to the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* of 2001 including the re-authorization in 2010, an in-depth investigation of national reform and how that has changed the role of the principal and teachers was conducted. The focus of the initiative will be on the pros and cons of educational accountability, with special

attention focused on the consequences of being data-driven for both principals and teachers.

Consequently, by investigating the role of the principal and teacher through the theoretical framework of leadership, four theories emerged as essential when working with principals and teachers in a public school setting: transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Chirichello, 1999; Hallinger, 2003), managerial leadership (Dressler, 2001; Hallinger, 2009; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Mintzberg, 1973), teacher leadership (Akert & Martin, 2012; Andrews & Crowther, 2002) and instructional leadership (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Bolman & Deal, 2003; Burns, 1978; Cuban, 1984; Fullan, 2001; Hallinger & Heck, 2000; Leithwood et al, 1999; Lezotte, 1994; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Sergiovanni, 1992). While all have value to the educational leader in various contexts, through the research, it will be argued that instructional leadership is the most effective approach when implementing reform change resulting in improved student learning (Fullan, 2001; O'Donnell & White, 2005; Stewart, 2006).

Accountability in Education

“Accountability, as mandated in federal and state legislation, was intended to improve the quality of education for all students” (Linn, 2003, p. 3), and as a result, *NCLB* provided an opportunity for all students to achieve regardless of their circumstances. The goal of such high-stakes testing was to determine whether students were meeting expectations. These outcomes were not considered optional and every measure was to be taken to ensure the success of students regardless of their membership in a subgroup that might have had difficulty in the past performing well on standardized tests (Baker, Linn, Herman, & Koretz, 2002; Englert, Fries, Goodwin, Martin-Glenn, &

Michael, 2004; Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2001). Accountability encouraged equality among subgroups (Hayes, 2008; Mintrop, 2004; Rice & Roellke, 2008; Stetcher & Hamilton, 2002), as schools were being individually evaluated and curriculum was expected to be adjusted to facilitate student success for all (Kahlenberg, 2008). As high-stakes accountability has redesigned how education conducts business, teachers and administrators across the nation have altered how education is implemented by focusing on learning outcomes and ensuring every child has an opportunity to learn (Dufour & Marzano, 2009; Hadden & Davies, 2002).

As with the volatile nature of accountability, there will always be conflicting views as to the impact of its effectiveness (Hayes, 2008; Kahlenberg, 2008). Though high-stakes testing has its benefits, it is the direct consequence accountability has on instruction, both curriculum and practices, that should be addressed. Linn (2003) agreed, “It is no surprise that attaching high-stakes to test results in an accountability system leads to a narrowing of the instructional focus...” (p. 4). Also with the implementation of *NCLB*, rigorous standards and opportunities are expected to be identical for all students and is “a cornerstone of the *NCLB* legislation” (Englert, Fries, Goodwin, Martin-Glenn, & Michael, 2004, pg. 2). However, the idea that independent schools have the ability to ensure such equality is irrational (Meier & Wood, 2004) and the focus should be placed on other factors such as impartiality of the assessment and improved student outcomes (Cizek, 1995; Firestone, 2009; O’Donnell & White, 2005). Yeh (2006) commented, “The design of current state-mandated tests assumes that the role of state-mandated tests should be limited to accountability rather than diagnosis...” (p. 519). Furthermore,

Reeves (2008) argued, “Focusing solely on test scores ignores many other inputs and outcomes that are crucial in determining education quality” (p. 89).

Though there are many criticisms of *NCLB* such as basing school effectiveness on a single test and comparing this year’s group of students to last year’s group of students (Reeves, 2008), it is rigid regulations that have weakened the acceptance of high-stakes testing. Conversely, *NCLB* has also led to narrowing of the curriculum to satisfy the assessment, increased intervention referrals and a preoccupation of test performance over items such as ensuring student safety and the dropout rate (Englert, Fries, Goodwin, Martin-Glenn, & Michael, 2004).

Furthermore, Mintrop (2004) acknowledged that accountability goals are not seen as pragmatic, and though teachers do not feel as if they are personally accountable for the assessment results, they are nonetheless blamed. Yet, *NCLB* has increased the involvement of principals (*NCLB*, 2001) resulting in school leaders that can no longer afford to stand by and allow teachers to take sole responsibility for student outcomes. As a result of *NCLB*, educational leaders have been forced to take steps to promote school improvement. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2005),

Principals are a key element in school improvement efforts. The emphasis on accountability, brought about by the passing of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, insists that school leaders not only implement effective programs but also provide evidence of their success and justification for changes (p. 3).

This justification has changed the way principals are expected to do business. As a result, within the last decade, principals have seen a dramatic change in their job description (Lashway, 2003). Whether or not high-stakes testing continues to be the status quo, the

changes made in education have had positive effects and “accountability is here to stay” (Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009, p. 354) and though high-stakes testing has created an environment where data-driven decision making is revered, there is research to suggest that successful leaders should instead adhere to effective leadership styles, building relationships between leader, teacher and student, and implementing necessary change (Bolden, Gosling, Marturano, & Dennison, 2003).

While the changing role of the principal in educational reform is invaluable, the changing role of the teacher leader is equally important. Bailey (2000) posited “Teaching is an almost impossible job” (p. 523). There are additional duties for the teacher both inside the classroom and outside the classroom (Bailey, 2000), and teachers have expanded their roles to accommodate these new commitments and responsibilities (Elmore, 1996; Hargreaves, 2000). While Kirtman (2002) claims the role of the teacher has changed surprisingly little in the last 100 years, Hargreaves (1994) argues that it is impossible to ignore how the nature and demands of the teacher’s job has changed over the years. Multiplying innovations due to accountability reform have driven classroom-level policy practices through the use of ongoing assessments, data collection, data-driven decision making, and pre-specified lists of competencies and objectives (Valli & Buese, 2007). Though the toll on teachers has been unfortunate, if student achievement was improving as a result of the policy expectations, the change would be worth the trouble (Valli & Buese, 2007), however, this does not seem to be the case with recent data showing that 48% of schools did not meet AYP (Heinrich, Burch, Good, Acosta, Cheng, Dillender, & Stewart, 2014) and modest evidence of accountability impact (Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, & Harrington, 2014). Regardless of its success, high-stakes

accountability has changed the role of the teacher and altered approaches to teaching practices (Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, & Harrington, 2014).

Data-Driven Decision Making

The goal of any educator is to create an environment where all judgments are carefully weighed and ultimately lead to improved instruction. It is this intention that led educational leaders to use data to drive instruction. Mandinach, Honey and Light (2006) argued “In the wake of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation, data-driven decision making has become a central focus of education policy and practice” (p. 2). In fact, data-driven decision making has developed a renewed interest concerning how data sets are analyzed for school improvement by teachers and principals (Bernhardt, 1998). *NCLB* directly mandates reform requirements where data are analyzed to improve school performance (Hamilton, Stecher, & Klein, 2002; Mandinach, Honey, & Light, 2006). According to the federal legislation, accountability is most effectively determined through the analysis of data (*NCLB*, 2001) and schools that expect to meet AYP are pressured to carefully examine student performance using high-stakes assessment (Firestone, 2009). This attention to data-driven decision making is a direct result of the pressures schools place on a single standardized test (Mandinach, Honey, & Light, 2006; Stringfield, et. al, 2005). Consequently, the data were frequently misrepresented, or used for the wrong determinations within school settings (Reeves, 2007) as a result of this extra pressure.

Reeves (2009) believed that instructional leaders are overwhelmed by the vast compilation of the data available. Initially, data was strictly collected for accountability measures (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Schmoker, 1996), however, as educational practices have changed, assessment data were regarded as more useful in improving

instruction (Mandinach, Honey, & Light, 2006; Popham, Cruse, Rankin, Sandifer, & Williams, 1985; Shepard, 1991). Mandinach, Honey, and Light (2006) noted, “Data is only useful for instructional planning when it is current, accurate, and in the hands of the teachers in a timely manner” (pp. 3-4). In addition, the assumption of data-based decision making is that principals and teachers use data to discover where students are academically performing, not necessarily to modify instruction (Mandinach, Honey, & Light; Massell, 1998). Consequently, there is a growing concern that the assemblage of data are not aiding quality instruction but rather focusing on the increased external pressures set by *NCLB* (Mandinach, Honey & Light, 2006). As a result of *NCLB*, educators have learned a great deal about data and how to use it efficiently, however, Reeves conjectured “Effective accountability must include more than a litany of student test scores...” (p. 89), while Mintrop and Sunderman (2009) argued that accountability will motivate teachers and principals when it is attached to broad educational standards and flexibility. For data to be meaningful there needs to be stakeholders concerned with the outcome of the testing providing principals, teachers and parents with information concerning the progress of their student (Englert, Fries, Goodwin, Martin-Glenn, & Michael, 2004). Consequently, administrators and teachers in under-performing schools are stepping up and creating environments where learning is first and foremost and parents are being asked to be involved (Keith et al., 1993; O’Donnell & White, 2005). These educators seem to be driven by the challenges they are facing and doing everything possible to meet the rigorous goals set by *NCLB* (Mintrop, 2004). Though many states are fervently trying to live up to these standards, there are several regions that have taken the data analysis one step further and report more than test scores such as: parental

involvement, the educational environment, the implementation of best practices, and student health in their yearly findings, thereby, providing the stakeholders with an enhanced picture of the atmosphere surrounding students' learning (Reeves, 2008). Stringfield, Reynolds, and Schaffer (2001) believed the "...use of data at the school level to be an incredibly difficult task" (p. 2). The effectiveness of data analysis is dependent upon the knowledge of the principals and teachers who implement such facts and figures. As information has doubled every 18 months (Chandler, 2013), the ability of the leader to turn scores into actionable data is even more important as schools must discriminate what information is considered useful in improving student achievement (Wayman, Midgley, & Stringfield, 2006), thus leadership is the key to understanding data and its applications. The following section will investigate the theoretical framework of leadership. In addition, several theories within the realm of leadership will be investigated including transformational, managerial, teacher leadership, and instructional leadership. Within these theoretical frames, the researcher will attempt to narrow the theoretical framework to identify the conceptual framework that is most applicable for this research study.

Leadership Theory

Yukl (2006) noted, "Leadership has been defined in terms of traits, behaviors, influence, interaction patterns, role relationships, and occupation of an administrative position" all while maintaining "intentional influence" over members within the organization (p. 2). Yet, according to Owens and Valesky (2007), "Leadership is not something that one does to people, nor is it a manner of behaving toward people: it is working with and through other people to achieve organizational goals" (p. 277). Thus, the debate of what true leadership means continues. In their report, Bolden, Gosling,

Marturano, and Dennison (2003) explained how initial thoughts concerning leadership concentrated on the various traits and qualities that made a good leader. In addition, they discussed how a successful leader performs under the stress of transformation and as a change agent; as a quality leader sifts through the information presented and guides the stakeholders. “Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done effectively, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish the shared objectives” (Yukl, 2002, p. 7). Heller and Firestone (1995) noted that as leadership is the backbone of organizational change, “Successful change results not from the work of a key leader, but from the effective performance of a series of change leadership functions” (p. 67). Consequently, leadership no longer demands a top-down approach to direction and with the myriad of concepts within the leadership school of thought, there is a shift from focusing on the development of successful leaders to the task of cultivating a more efficient organization (Bolden, Gosling, Marturano, & Dennison, 2003). It is this unique blend of management and vision that defines leadership in the educational arena (NAESP, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Duke, Grogan, and Tucker (2003) contended “Educational leadership entails more than providing direction...it entails an understanding of how young people learn and how to improve instruction (p. 202).

During the 1960s and 1970s, the investigation of school leaders and their impact on the success of students was in its infancy (Fullan, 1991; Hallinger, 1992). Though this idea was revolutionary, there was little research to back up the implementation of principals as anything more than managers of the school setting. However, within the next decade, sufficient research was conducted and strong leadership was found to be

indispensable for significant change (Arends, 1982; Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Edmonds, 1979; Heller & Firestone, 1995). Chubb and Moe (1990) concluded that student achievement was directly affected by school principals that have a clear purpose, strong instructional leadership, high quality staff, and solid programs. In their findings, Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003, 2004, 2005) concurred as they found a significant positive correlation between effective school leadership and student achievement. With new interest in student outcomes, leadership theory became a catalyst in determining whether administrators or others (Akert & Martin, 2012) directly affected student success.

The Education Alliance and NAESP (2003) stated, “In the era of standards-based education and high-stakes accountability for the performance of students and adults in our schools, the job of principal has never been more complex or more critical” (p. 7). Since the implementation of *NCLB*, a number of studies have been conducted to explore student achievement (Education Alliance & NAESP; Fullan, 2002; Hargreaves & Fink, 2004; Harris, 2004; Mazzeo, 2003; Waters et al., 2003) and it was discovered that school leaders, both principal and teacher, positively impacted student success (Leithwood & Duke, 1999). As such, effective school leadership has been linked to improved instruction, student motivation, and positive student outcomes (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). In addition, research has shown that student achievement is not influenced by school resources or by governmental policies, as previously assumed, but by what effective leaders do (Andrews, Basom, & Basom, 1991; Chubb & Moe, 1990).

Over the past twenty years, substantial research has been conducted concerning the importance of quality leadership in a school setting (Bush, 2003; Hadden & Davies,

2002; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). As a result, an abundance of theories have emerged within the confines of principal leadership (Hallinger, 2003; Stewart, 2006). However, according to Hallinger (1992), an educational leader might find three practices: transformational, managerial, and instructional leadership to be the most promising during such times of change as the *NCLB* era (Bush, 2003; Wilmore & Thomas, 2001) as all three theories are considered to be multifaceted and diverse (Bush; Bush & Glover, 2002; Hallinger; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). Conversely, in response to the high-stakes accountability of *NCLB*, policy makers have recognized the need to place teachers as one of the focal points of school improvement (Berry, Johnson, & Montgomery, 2005). In order to move schools toward excellence, Starratt (1995) argued there is growing evidence that involvement by teachers in educational reform is essential, while Barth (2001a) declared “Schools badly need the leadership of teachers if they are to improve” (p. 84). Thus, the importance of teacher leadership emerged in the literature (Bailey, 2000; Ballet, Kelchtermans, & Loughran, 2006; Elmore, 1996; O’Day, 2002; Smylie & Denny, 1990; Valli & Buese, 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Transformational Leadership

According to Yukl (2006), the word *transformational* is often described as being synonymous with the term *effective leadership*. Though broad, this definition is somewhat accurate in that a transformational leader has extrinsic qualities that are viewed as the “Ultimate role in social change...”(Burns, 1978, p. 252). There are two necessary elements for transformational change: the leader has a strong personality and the followers are willing to be led (Yukl, 2006). Bass (1985) wrote, “Charisma is a necessary

ingredient of transformational leadership” (p. 31) and subsequently, under the guidance of a transformational leader, supporters are motivated to follow the leader due to high levels of “trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect toward the leader” (Yukl, 2006 p. 262). Bass (1996) contended that transformation occurs by making followers conscious of how important the task is and encouraging the participants to put the needs of the organization above personal needs which in turn activates higher order needs. This intrinsic motivation is most effective when the follower feels as if the organization’s goals are similar to their own personal aspirations (Bono & Judge, 2003; Yukl, 2006). As transformational leadership focuses on inspiring change through a bottom-up method and not employing a principal that coordinates from above, it is often seen as a type of shared or distributed leadership (Day, et al., 2001; Hallinger, 2003; Jackson, 2000; Marks & Printy, 2003). Leithwood and Poplin (1992) noted three fundamental goals of transformational leadership: 1) develop a school culture, 2) provide intense teacher development, and 3) encourage staff members to solve all problems collectively (p. 9). Though, at first review, transformational leadership may seem to be a suitable theory in dealing with change, with the ever-mounting accountability pressures of political reforms such as *NCLB*, principals no longer have the benefit of relying on others to make change happen (Bottery, 2001; Bush, 2003).

In addition to dealing with restrictive mandates, there are three assumptions found within transformational theory: 1) followers will be committed to perform their duties, 2) personal commitments by the followers will lead to extra output, and 3) both leader and follower have mutual goals (Bush, 2003; Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). Though assumptions might be seen as a limitation to transformational

leadership, there are other additional concerns within the theory. Chirichello (1999), an advocate for transformational theory, admitted that not only can transformational leadership be perceived as a way to control teachers; the change initiatives are more likely to be implemented by the leaders than the followers which is counterproductive with the tenets of *NCLB*. Leithwood (1994) and Hallinger concluded that transformational leadership was built on fostering group goals and the leader within the organization spent a vast amount of time developing human resources. In conclusion, transformational leadership takes time (Bass & Avolio, 1993) yet the high accountability of *NCLB* stipulates immediate action (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), which might limit the effective of the use of the transformational theory in a reform setting.

Managerial Leadership

Owens and Valesky (2007) posited “...leaders need to be skilled managers well able to deal with the mundane inner workings of organizational life that must be attended to if the vision is to be realized” (p. 288). Traditionally, the principal’s role has been focused around managerial leadership (Dressler, 2001), with a tangible focus on tasks such as reading email, meetings, discipline, budgeting, and interacting with peers (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Yukl, 1982). According to Mintzberg (1973) and Yukl (1984), managerial leadership includes three leadership components: Interpersonal, Information Processor, and Decision-Maker. Each element is subdivided into duties to further define the role of the manager. The Interpersonal role consists of the figurehead, the leader, and the liaison. Information Processing is made up of the monitor, the disseminator, and the spokesman and finally, the Decision-Maker encompasses the

entrepreneur, the disciplinarian, the resource allocator, and the negotiator (Mintzberg, 1973; Yukl, 1982).

When examining the accumulation of duties required of the principal, it seems that a managerial perspective is fitting for effective leadership within a school. Yet, Owens and Valesky (2007) contended that a focus on such mundane tasks as rule enforcement and operation procedures has averted school leaders from the true business of schools: student learning. In addition, with the increasing demands of high-stakes accountability, day-to-day business is no longer the only responsibility of the school leader. Though management responsibilities are still a concern for principals, working directly with teachers in curriculum and instruction are currently primary roles for the instructional leader (Bossert, et al., 1982; Cuban, 1984; Dwyer, 1986; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger et al. 1996; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Hallinger, 2005; Heck et al., 1990; Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1990; Mangin, 2007; Murphy, 1990). Unfortunately, with limited time, principals are continually expected to instigate change, supervise personnel issues, control all of the internal and external issues of a building, all while providing instructional efficacy (Fullan, 1991; Portin & Shen, 1999; Vandenberghe, 1995). “Often times, more attention is accorded to managerial and administrative tasks and that of the instructional leader is relegated to others in the administrative hierarchy even though the core business of a school is teaching and learning” (Phillips, 2010, ¶1). This dilemma is what challenges managerial leadership as a valid choice when leading a building through change and as the role of the administrator has been altered as a direct result of *NCLB* and high-stakes accountability (Owens & Valesky, 2007), research illustrates that relying on management theory alone will not result in improved student

achievement (Bottoms & Fry, 2009). Additionally, managerial theory assumes a “highly stable environment” (Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2011, p. 12) and as Lashway (2003) and Ruff and Shoho (2005) both agreed that the role of principals and teachers are constantly changing as stakeholders expect more, there needs to be a balancing act as administrators feel compelled to be managers but are expected to implement the more challenging instructional practices of *NCLB*.

Teacher Leadership

Barth (2001b) suggested “Teachers who assume responsibility for something they care desperately about...stand at the gate of profound learning” (p. 445). Yet to create an environment of improved student achievement, principals and teachers need to work together (Andrews & Crowther, 2002). Since it is important to remember that instructional leadership is not solely the responsibility of the principal, teachers must accept an active role if schools are to improve and teaching is to achieve professional status (Pellicer & Anderson, 1995). Teacher leadership can drive change as it involves individuals at all levels within the educational organization (Akert & Martin, 2012; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001) and with increased popularity during the last 20 years, teacher leaders are assuming both instructional and organizational level leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The concept of teacher leadership proposes intrinsic involvement in the way schools operate and in the central purpose of teaching and learning (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Though teacher leadership began as a movement concerned with the continuation of the teaching field (Sykes, 1990) and economic growth (Berry & Ginsberg, 1990), it has become closely aligned with instructional leadership typically focused on the behaviors of teachers as they engage in

activities directly affecting the growth of students (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Additionally, teacher leadership has the ability to engage peers in investigations and the implementation of proven instructional practices thereby improving student achievement (Wasley, 1991).

There are many benefits to empowering teachers in a leadership role as they have a vital knowledge regarding the daily operations of the school setting while interacting with the clientele (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). When teachers are involved in decision making, there is higher morale, better decisions concerning students, and ownership in organizational goals (Barth, 2001b). Neuman and Simmons (2000) theorized that it is everyone in the educational community's responsibility and right to be a leader.

Fullan (1994) asserted,

Teacher leadership is not for a few; it is for all. The vast majority of teacher must become new professionals...We cannot achieve quality learning for all, or nearly all, student until quality development is attained and sustained for all teachers (p. 246).

Instructional Leadership

As the responsibilities of instructional leadership are currently a underpinning for the focus of principals and teachers (Grint, 2005; Mangin, 2007; Murphy, 1990; Reitzug, West, & Angel, 2008), instructional leadership appears to be the best course of action with regards to high-stakes testing, the accountability of *NCLB*, and ensuring successful student outcomes (Smith & Andrews, 1989; Tucker, 2003). "Successful schools are characterized as those that have a clear sense of purpose, strong instructional leadership, true professionalism among the staff, and ambitious academic programs" (Andrews,

Bosom, & Bosom, 1991, p. 97). Both Bush (2003) and Southworth (2002) contended that instructional leadership is important as it focuses on the goals of the school setting: teaching, learning and student growth. “The increasing emphasis on managing teaching and learning as the core activities of educational institutions has led to ‘instructional leadership’ being emphasized and endorsed” (Bush, p. 15). The following research will further explain the benefits of instructional leadership for both principals and teachers and pinpoint why it is the most effective conceptual framework to implement during times of high-stakes reform.

Instructional Leadership Theory

Although there are no collective definitions of instructional leadership (Bullard & Taylor, 1993), all definitions have one common outcome: effective instructional leadership can produce improved academic achievement (Burns, 1978; Bennis, 2000; Bolman & Deal, 2003; Fullan, 2001; Hallinger & Heck, 2000; Leithwood et al., 1999; Lezotte, 1994; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Sergiovanni, 1992). The innumerable roles associated with the instructional leader helps create the true understanding of its definition. These educators can be found supervising curriculum, providing professional development, gaining funds and resources for improved instruction, establishing comprehensible goals through a mission and vision, creating a positive culture with the staff and the community, supporting collaboration, and aiding peers through BEST practices, all with the intent of improving student outcomes (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Flath, 1989; Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger, 2005; NAESP, 2001; Portin & Shen, 1998). “Because the main mission of schools focuses on teaching and learning, and because schools’ effectiveness often is measured by academic achievement, it is vitally

important that the educational leader focus his or her time, energy, and priorities on instructional leadership” (Midlock, 2011, p. 8).

It was academic achievement that first identified the need for instructional leadership and in the early 1980s, when there was a shift from the principal focusing solely on managing the school setting to a leader that directly influenced instruction (Hallinger, 2009). This shift was reflected within the *Effective Schools Movement* and changed the way schools did business with principals and teacher leaders finding themselves responsible for school improvement (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger; Hallinger & Heck, 2000; O'Donnell & White, 2005). Lezotte (1994) explained the correlates of an effective school and identified their framework for school improvement: 1) safe and orderly environment, 2) climate of high expectations, 3) instructional leadership, 4) clear and focused mission, 5) opportunities to learn and time on task, 6) frequent monitoring of student progress, and 7) home and school relations (pp. 2-7). Through the effective school movement, there were several new initiatives that were assigned to this new construct of leadership for the administrator, resulting in instructional leadership emerging as a pressing role for the school principal (Bossert, et al., 1982; Dwyer, 1986; Edmonds; Glasman, 1984; Hallinger, 2005; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

In this era of reform, principals were now being held accountable, alongside teachers, for instructional improvement (Firestone & Riehl, 2005; Lugg, Bulkley, Firestone, & Garner, 2002; Mangin, 2007). As a result of the refocus to improve student outcomes, Hallinger (2005) noted, “Principals again find themselves at the nexus of accountability and school improvement with an increasingly explicit expectation that they

will function as “instructional leaders” (p. 2). Thus, the accountability noted in *NCLB* has uncovered a renewed interest in instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2005; O’Donnell & White, 2005). Furthermore, principals that choose to ignore their instructional role in school improvement risk losing their jobs when poor performance is identified (Hallinger; Jackson, 2000; Lam, 2003; Tomlinson, 2003).

Phillips (2010) posited schools were more effective when the leaders considered themselves to be instructional leaders versus schools where principals were viewed as strictly administrators. Similarly, Hallinger (2005) commented, “...in the United States, instructional leadership became strongly identified as a normatively desirable role that principals who wished to be effective should fulfill” (p. 223) and by the turn of the century, standards and accountability became the new buzz words and the *NCLB* law was enacted. Instructional leadership was once again highlighted as a plausible solution for lagging assessment scores. In the era of *NCLB*, instructional leadership was no longer a proposition, it was an expectation (Lashway, 2003) and steps were taken to ensure principals practiced as instructional leaders, thereby guaranteeing success within their school buildings (Barth, 1986; Cuban, 1984; Hallinger, 1992; Hallinger; Hallinger & Wimpelberg, 1992; *NCLB*, 2001) Since *NCLB* mandated the necessity for all educational leaders to develop strong instructional proficiency, the theory of instructional leadership became more prominent than in previous years (*NCLB*, 2001) and as a direct result of *NCLB*, instructional leadership was again featured as an important framework for student success (Firestone & Riehl, 2005; Lugg, Bulkley, Firestone, & Garner, 2002; Reitzug, West, & Angel, 2008).

Instructional leadership had reemerged as a useful strategy to create a progressive, student centered environment (e-Lead, 2011). However, the question remained whether or not instructional leadership was, in fact, effective for raising student achievement. Andrews et al. (1986) and Andrews and Soder (1987), conducted studies in over 200 schools that found a positive correlation to high achieving schools and strong instructional leaders and Hallinger (2005) concurred by stating a principal's time was better spent influencing effective classroom instruction versus evaluating teachers or supervising the building. Through the use of intentional leadership practices and purpose, effective schools develop a pattern of continuous success (Barth, 1990; Glasman, 1984; Hallinger; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Heck et al., 1990; Mortimore, 1993; Purkey & Smith, 1983) and as a result, the instructional leadership framework ensures efficient instruction and ultimately higher student outcomes. "Principals must provide instructional leadership to facilitate and promote active learning experiences for all students. Through their words and actions, principals model the importance of students being actively engaged in their learning..." (Quinn, 2002, p. 452). A principal's priorities were no longer centered on traditional administrative concerns, but instead, education had evolved into enriching instructional and curricular issues that directly affected student achievement. Whether or not a school showed gains in core competencies was significantly related to the curricular strength of the leader (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Quinn, 2002).

Consequently, instructional leadership should be profoundly entrenched in the role of the principal (Sergiovanni, 2006) and as such, Smith and Andrews (1989)

collected four areas of strategic interaction that an instructional leader should implement: 1) curricular resource, 2) instructional mentor, 3) communicator, and 4) visible presence.

Curricular Resource

Mangieri and Arnn (1985) identified curriculum development as one of the top three priorities of instructional leadership. Functions of instructional leaders include: overseeing and implementing curriculum development, providing up-to-date resources, keeping in touch with the latest teaching, learning, assessment and motivational developments while having a deep understanding of the newest literature (Hoy & Hoy, 2003). In addition, curriculum can further be strengthened through the use of professional development. It is the responsibility of the instructional leader to provide individualized opportunities for teachers to strengthen their knowledge of curriculum and creative approaches to change (Andrews, Basom, & Basom, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1990).

Instructional Mentor

Instructional leaders provide teachers with skills that improve instruction. They focus on the behaviors of teachers to promote engaging activities that directly affect student growth (Hallinger & Heck, 2000; Smith & Andrews, 1989). This multi-dimensional role plays upon the expertise of the principal while promoting improved student outcomes. Administrators use the principles of instructional leadership to foster relationships with teachers to create a cohesive improvement effort, model learning, and balance reform efforts (Lashway, 2002). In addition, as assessment experts, principals can shift schools from cultures of internal accountability to meet the demands of external accountability which all aid in student achievement (Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas, 2007).

Communicator

Instructional leaders guide the school by implementing aligned school missions. Andrews, Basom, and Basom (1991) noted, “A school’s vision, sense of mission and culture are directly related to the beliefs of the principal” (p. 99). By using quality mission statements, a school’s culture and structure can be affected for the betterment of the student body (Barth, 1990; Dwyer, 1986; Hallinger, 2005; Hallinger & Heck, 1996a, 1996b; Leitner, 1994; Southworth, 2002). Principals that embrace instructional leadership qualities should provide a clear vision, successfully relate the school’s mission, manage the instructional program, and make attributes of instructional effectiveness available to educators (Bullard & Taylor, 1993; Edmonds, 1979; Smith & Andrews, 1989; Snyder & Johnson, 1984).

Visible Presence

To ensure the success of the mission and vision, the instructional leader must be available and his/her presence must be felt (Smith & Andrews, 1989). Principals should be available to listen, share new ideas, and empathize with the teachers. In addition, instructional leaders should conduct walk-throughs, informally stroll through the halls, and be available for classroom participation. It is the interaction of the instructional leader that will bring about success and most importantly, raise student achievement (Andrews, Basom, & Basom, 1991).

Principals are a catalyst for building level school reform when they demonstrate the strategic interactions of an instructional leader (Edmonds, 1979; Hart & Bredson, 1996; MacKay & Ralston, 1999; Smith & Andrews, 1989). Specifically, this study is grounded in literature that supports the principal and teacher as a vital ingredient for a

successful school during times of change. The next section will elaborate on the changing role of the instructional leader and how reforms such as *NCLB* have influenced the design. As Bredeson (1992) concluded, “Principals must understand their new roles if school restructuring is to be successful” (p. 4) whereas Ballet, Kelchtermans, and Loughran (2006) posited teachers are working harder due to an increasing, intensifying, and expanding role as a result of accountability measures enacted by educational reform.

Accountability and the Changing Role of the Instructional Leader

“*No Child Left Behind* has solidified one emerging trend: school leaders are change agents” (Lashway, 2003, ¶23), and as high-stakes accountability has restructured the way schools are governed (Reeves, 2008), leaders are left asking the question: How has high-stakes accountability changed the way I perform as an instructional leader?

The challenges that educators face are numerous and with the addition of accountability at the local level, changes have begun to alter how schools are managed (Firestone, 2009; Lashway, 2003). School improvement reforms have taken the average school leader and changed their role into something unrecognizable (Barth, 1986; Hallinger, 2005; Hallinger & Wimpelberg, 1992). By simply adding the instructional component to the daily job of the principal, the work load of the school administrator has changed (Mangin, 2007) resulting in how the work load of the teacher has changed. Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, and Thomas (2005), suggested, “The work of elementary and middle school leadership is undergoing a revolution” (p. 6) and as a result of accountability, school leaders are not only responsible for managerial duties such as discipline, staff needs, and resource distribution, but policy makers and the public now hold school administrators personally responsible for student achievement (Halverson,

Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas; Lashway; Mandinach, Honey, & Light, 2006; Ruff & Shoho, 2005). Principals describe their role as a changing one (Portin & Shen, 1998; Williams & Portin, 1997) and as the role of the school administrator changes, leaders are encouraged to revisit the characteristics of their position. For example, Jacobs and Jacques (1990) as well as Schein (1992) recommended instructional leaders question their role and make changes accordingly. Hopkins and Ainscow (1993) noted, “We now live in a change rich environment, where multiple policy initiatives and innovation overload are the norm” (p. 303) so consequently, the question that school administrators have to answer is: How will I adapt to these changes yet continue to be effective? Hallinger suggested, “...principal effectiveness is attained by finding the correct balance among these roles...” (p. 222) and as the influence of *NCLB* is renewing the need for traditional instructional leaders, principals are turning to several practices within the theory of instructional leadership to find the balance needed to assure student success (Reitzug, West, & Angel, 2008).

One way instructional leaders can influence accountability yet balance their responsibilities is to recognize the needs of a school with a mission. By establishing a clear vision of the school’s goals, the principal can focus on specific ways to ensure optimal student achievement (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987; Stewart, 2006; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2009) as various researchers consider a quality school mission to be the most important article an instructional leader can produce (Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010). Though the average administrator is inundated with a variety of roles (Hallinger, 2005), the implementation of a school mission is thought to be well worth the time (O’Donnell & White, 2005). Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003) claimed that in a study of seven leadership behaviors, defining and communicating a mission had the

greatest result. In addition, Goldring and Pasternak (1994) maintained that the principal's role in creating school goals, a clear mission, and assisting teachers and staff was a viable predictor of student outcomes. As it is ultimate goal of all educational leaders to create higher student achievement, the implementation of a clear mission seems both useful and straightforward during times of change (Hadden & Davies, 2002).

An additional way the instructional leader can balance their role is to become directly involved with their teachers and staff (Hallinger, 2009; Sheppard, 1996; Stewart, 2006). By modeling good instruction, providing professional development opportunities, and providing curricular and instructional resources, effective administrators encourage instructional change (Barth, 1990; Heller & Firestone, 1995; Mangin, 2007). "Principal instructional leadership has shifted from a focus on the principal as "an inspector of teacher competence" to the principal as "a facilitator of teacher growth" (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 374). Though valuable, this change from tradition has not only altered how schools are managed, but it continues to add to the plate of the administrator as policy makers, stakeholders, and the media expect principals to direct instruction, be accountable for student achievement, manage certified teachers and staff, and interact with students all while implementing every new program and educational reform that comes along (Portin & Shen, 1998). In addition, Cooley and Shen (2003) suggested that principals were exposed to new performance tasks that had simply been added to the former job requirements. "The principalship has simply become more challenging" (Portin & Shen, p. 101) yet it is the responsibility of the principal to find "...the correct balance among these roles" (Hallinger, 2005, p. 222).

Accountability and the Changing Role of the Teacher

Over the years, teachers have found themselves in a continuously changing environment and as a result, they have found it necessary to change their practices in response to educational trends and policy demands (Valli & Buese, 2007). With the ratification of NCLB, high-stakes accountability has changed the role of teachers and as a result, teachers are working harder because of these accountability measures (Ballet, Kelchtermans, & Loughran, 2006; O'Day, 2002). Valli and Buese (2007) found that increasing role expectations could be classified into four areas: instructional, institutional, collaborative, and learning.

Instructional

Instructional practice has been altered as a result of high-stakes accountability. Watered down curriculum, focusing on test-taking strategies, and teaching to the test have all influenced the instruction that students receive (Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, & Harrington, 2014; Valli & Buese, 2007). Though instructional practice is the core of the educator (Elmore, 1996), getting to a deeper level of analysis while collecting and analyzing student learning data from assessments is the next push as a result of accountability reform (Fenton & Murphy, 2014; Thompson, 2010). Thompson (2010) further commented that collection of data, item analysis, and multiple types of instruction happening simultaneously have changed the look of instructional practices and as a result, the role of the teacher as the instructional leader.

Institutional

In addition to changing roles in the classroom, teachers are experiencing a change in role outside of the classroom (Bailey, 2000; Valli & Buese, 2007). Andrews and

Crowther (2002) suggested that when teachers fill various roles and join their principal in the leadership of the building, considerable reform takes place and school goals are more likely to be met. Teachers have always adapted in response to change but within the last two decades, changes in the expectations of teacher leadership have risen drastically (Valli & Buese, 2007). Fortunately, researchers have found these external demands on the teacher's role has promoted teacher reliance rather than the isolation prior to the accountability mandates (Bailey, 2000, Valli & Buese, 2007) and as "teacher leaders emerge within these schools to fill many roles; they join their principals as colleagues to help achieve the schools' desired goals" (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001, p. ix).

Collaborative

Over the past 20 years, educators have recognized the importance of collaboration but never with as much pressure as felt during these times of accountability (Paulsen, 2008). The modified role of the educator is collaborative all the while intentionally and purposefully working toward the goal of increased student achievement (Little & Bartlett, 2002) with little regard for the mandates of accountability. As perpetual change requires time to facilitate (Fullan, 2000, 2003), collaboration requires school leaders to designate specific time for educators to get together (Fullan, 2000; Murphy, 1997) and the outcome of such reflective conversations will guide the faculty to sustaining plans of action and more effective instruction (Dearman & Alber, 2005). With the isolation of teachers leading to little or no change in student performance, administrators and teachers are obligated to collaborate for effective instructional practices which will ultimately result in improved student achievement (Greenwood & Maheady, 2001).

Learning

Teachers should not only teach, they must also continue to learn by acquiring sophisticated knowledge, practicing new theories and studying the abundance of information that is available to them (Darling-Hammond, 1995).

Darling-Hammond (1995) posited,

...teachers need to understand subject matter deeply and flexibly, so that they can help students create useful cognitive maps, relate ideas to one another, and address misconceptions. Teachers need to see how ideas connect across fields and to everyday life. This kind of understanding provides a foundation for pedagogical content knowledge (¶4).

Through a framework, NCLB mandated states ensure high quality professional development (Borko, 2004) and though changes of this magnitude will require a great deal of learning on the part of teachers and will be difficult to make without guidance and support from school leaders, Borko (2004) makes it clear that teacher professional development is essential to improve our schools. Through teacher education, stronger practices will not only improve the quality of teaching, it will improve student achievement (Birman, Le Floch, Klekotka, Ludwig, Taylor, & Walters, 2007). As an impact of high-stakes accountability, teachers will engage in questioning, investigating, and learning and will ultimately improve student success (Fullan 2000).

Summary

This review of literature revealed the impact of high-stakes accountability and its effect on instructional leaders and teachers. State and federal legislation were mandated to improve education and though reform is not new to the educational arena, the

implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 changed the face of accountability requirements for educators in the public school setting. To respond to these new issues, principals were pressured to change from their traditional roles as managers to leaders that provided the necessary tools to raise student achievement (Gray & Bishop, 2009) and teachers also altered their roles from the classroom educator to teacher leaders in the school environment (Valli & Buese, 2007). The research illustrated how schools were expected to meet average yearly progress (AYP) while data-driven decision making became an essential focus concerning educational policy and practice (Mandinach, Honey, & Light, 2006). Federal reforms, such as *NCLB*, were not without criticism. Strict sanctions, single tests comparing different groups of students, and narrowing of the curriculum created challenges for leaders as they attempted to implement the necessary changes for improved student outcome.

Through the review of current literature, the importance of the instructional leader was reiterated. The research for this study intentionally focused on leadership as the theoretical framework. As leadership was defined as working with and through others to achieve organizational goals, (Owens, & Valesky, 2007), the research conveyed that leadership was no longer a top-down approach. Consequently, school principals have attempted to shed their traditional role as managers, and instead focus their attention on improving student achievement. Through synthesizing the literature, it was clear that principals are a direct influence on student outcomes as a result of quality leadership. Hallinger (1992) suggested three theories that would assist the school principal in implementing change: transformational, managerial, and instructional leadership.

Of these three designs, instructional leadership, the conceptual framework for this study, emerged as the most viable theory during a high-stakes reform movement.

According to Andrews and Soder (1987), there are four areas that have been identified as valuable to the instructional leader: 1) curricular resource, 2) instructional mentor, 3) communicator, and 4) visible presence. Through the implementation of these interactions, the instructional leader will glean insight on how BEST to direct the school environment during times of change.

As all of this change occurs, the school leader is left wondering how high-stakes accountability has changed the role of the principal and teacher. The school improvement reform created new ideals of what responsibilities the principal should employ. In addition to the traditional management duties, school leaders are expected to ensure student achievement as directed by *NCLB*. It is a balancing act for the 21st century principal as their job has become so much more challenging.

In Chapter Three, the framework for the research design and methodology will be explained. This discussion will include the research questions and design, the participants and sampling, methods of data collection, the data analysis, and the limitations. The rationale for selecting a qualitative, multi-case study will be described. Within chapter four, presentation of the data and analysis of the findings will be presented. Finally, provided in Chapter Five will be the conclusion, implications, and recommendations concerning the impact high-stakes accountability have on the role of the instructional leader.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

There is extensive research on the impact of the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* of 2001 (*NCLB*, 2002). With the vast array of studies (Hallinger & Heck, 2000; Lezotte, 1994; O'Donnell & White, 2005; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003) that have been conducted on instructional leadership theory, there is a wealth of information concerning the benefits and contributions principals provide in an elementary school environment. However, based on the review of literature, there is limited information on how principals' and teachers' roles as instructional leaders have been altered. Principals are the foundation for instructional leadership in an elementary school (Sergiovanni, 2004) coupled with the role that teachers play in student achievement (Rand Education, 2012). The instructional leader's primary responsibility is to facilitate best instructional practices thereby increasing student achievement. Principals are recognized as contributory factors to improved student achievement by providing effective instructional leadership to teachers (Hallinger & Heck, 2000; Lezotte, 1994; O'Donnell & White, 2005; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). As a result, the intent of this qualitative multi-case research study was to investigate how high-stakes accountability such as *NCLB* has impacted the role of the instructional leader, how instructional leaders are using data to drive instruction, and to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of high-stakes accountability on instructional leadership throughout a school setting (Creswell, 2007). By addressing the research design and methodology, study participants, data collection,

and analysis methods, quality controls and potential study limitations, the researcher has detailed the design of the qualitative multi-case study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how the role of the instructional leader has been impacted as a result of high-stakes testing accountability through a case study design. As there is a plethora of information on high-stakes accountability, data-driven research, and instructional leadership it was the intention of the researcher to investigate the role of the instructional leader, both principal and teacher, and determine whether or not high-stakes testing actually did influence the focus of those roles (Lezotte, 1994; O'Donnell & White, 2005). "Although numerous studies have investigated the relationship between the instructional leadership behaviors of principals and student achievement, most have not been conducted in an environment as politically driven as the current assessment-based educational system" (O'Donnell & White, 2005, p. 2). The ultimate goal of the research was to create an "in-depth picture of the case" regarding the impact of high-stakes testing on the instructional leader (Creswell, 2007, p. 132). This examination should serve as a catalyst for future research in determining whether an instructional leader is beneficial in improving student achievement.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study in examining how high-stakes accountability testing has influenced the role of the instructional leader.

- (1) How has the issue of accountability, as framed by *NCLB*, impacted the role of elementary principals as instructional leaders?

- (2) How has the issue of accountability, as framed by *NCLB*, impacted the role of teachers as instructional leaders?
- (3) In what way, if any, do educators perceive high-stakes accountability as being influential in decision making, curriculum selection, and school goals?
- (4) What, if any, are some of the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing as perceived by principals and teachers?

Rationale for Use of a Qualitative Multi-Case Study

Throughout this investigation, the researcher focused on the purpose of the study and as a result identified a qualitative multi-case study to be the most appropriate form of design (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Specifically with a problem of practice or phenomena regarding high-stakes accountability, using data to drive instruction and their impact on instructional leadership a multi case study is needed (Creswell, 2007). Using a variety of sources to gather data, this problem of practice explored multiple lenses to allow thoughts concerning the phenomenon being investigated (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The theoretical framework of leadership was the overarching focus used within the research, with the conceptual framework focused on instructional leadership.

When choosing a design and method, Creswell (2007) stated, “...a qualitative research study is a form of inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand” (p. 39). Qualitative studies help the researcher understand what the participants feel, think, and believe with respect to the topic being studied (Mertens, 2005). This research encouraged individuals to speak for themselves and provided them with an opportunity to discuss their own perspectives therefore; qualitative

research was used as an interactive progression in which the subjects taught the researcher about their lives as principals and teachers in high-stakes accountability school environments (Hughes, 1988). Sherman and Webb (1988) commented, "...qualitative [research] implies a direct concern with experience as it is 'lived' or 'felt' or 'undergone'" (p. 10). "Much of what we cannot observe for ourselves has been or is being observed by others...the case will not be seen the same by everyone. Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case" (Stake, 1995, p. 64).

For that reason, this researcher chose a multi-case study to investigate various viewpoints on the subject of instructional leadership, thereby "the colorful description in a case study can create an image" (Merriam, 1988, p. 179). It was the intent of the researcher to construct a variety of images concerning the instructional impact of *NCLB*. A "...detailed description of each case and...a thematic analysis across the cases using a cross-case analysis" will be provided (Mertens, 2005, p. 75). A multi-case study enabled the researcher to extract details from the perspectives of the participants by using various sources of data, such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis. Such data sources are important when finding the common themes of multi-case studies, since "readers can learn vicariously from an encounter with the case through the researcher's narrative description" (Stake, 2000, p. 179). Through these descriptions resulting from interviews, focus groups, observations, and reviewing of documents will "...provide a voice for the[se] participants" (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). The researcher investigated how *NCLB* changed the instructional responsibility of each participant. Through the use of a "...thick description," the researcher determined how these

instructional leaders have been influenced by increased accountability pressure to use data to drive instruction (Mertens, 2005, p. 256) and how their roles have changed.

Participants and Sampling

Choosing the correct population was essential to the success of this qualitative study. Creswell (2007) believed qualitative research is not the study of individuals or sites but the act of collecting detailed information from various sources resulting in the goal of the researcher to provide an understanding of the individual cases, while attempting to go deeper, finding themes, and connections (Mertens, 2005).

The researcher chose a criterion-based sampling method to ensure the population was selected purposefully. Merriam (1998) stated, "...purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 61). Patton (1990) asserted, "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich* cases for study in depth...one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful sampling*" (p. 160). There were multiple criterions the researcher employed when choosing the participants. The first criterion was the school setting. To assure comparable student populations, only suburban school districts surrounding one large metropolitan city in one Midwest state were considered. There were two districts chosen to provide the multiple lens of the multi-case study. These two school districts were chosen, based on both of their locations being close to a metropolitan setting, yet they were considered suburban and their student population was the same in demographics and size. From each of these districts, two principals were chosen based on length of tenure for a total of 4 principals

being studied. In addition, the criterion used to select teachers from these buildings was also based upon number of years' experience. The principals and the teachers selected had to have been in the role for at least eight years (pre and post *NCLB*). The third criterion for selection of the principal was that the principal was viewed as an instructional leader by the superintendent, and the teachers were viewed as teacher leaders by the principal.

These steps in selecting the participants were based on their validity which measure how meaningful the information was and how solid the themes and connections identified would be from the data collection. Selecting the participants on the criteria of pre and post *NCLB*, enhanced reflection and dialogue on how *NCLB* has changed focus in schools. Adding the additional criteria of being instructional leaders enhanced the depth of dialogue the participants should have regarding instructional leadership. To this end, Creswell (2007) stated, "The researcher will need to decide if the sampling will be consistent with the information needed" (p. 125).

Furthermore, qualitative research lends itself to focusing on the robust data that are gathered, rather than the number of participants. The sample size should center on what the researcher wants to gather from the conversation, the purpose of the questioning, what information will be useful to the study, how credible the participants are, and how all of this will fit into a strict time-table (Creswell, 2007). It is recommended that there be no more than four or five cases in a study because "the number should provide ample opportunity to identify themes of the cases as well as conduct cross-case theme analysis" (Creswell, p. 128). Thus, the intent was to establish credible data collection methods by selecting four elementary school settings resulting in

four principals being interviewed, four focus groups of five teachers being conducted, observations at the four settings, and document analysis from each setting.

Although this selection process did not statistically represent the vast number of principals and teachers available, the sample can be defended as valid, as the participants were chosen according to purposeful sampling (Mertens, 2005). As a result of studying this participant, knowledge should be gained concerning how instructional leaders (principals and teachers) perceive that *NCLB* has changed their role, and how the mandates of high-stakes accountability have changed their decision-making.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Merriam (1988) and Patton (1980) assembled numerous data factors that included interacting with the participants and observing behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs. These data should be collected to provide a picture that has “depth and detail” (Patton, 1980, p. 22). Therefore, the researcher intended to collect data for a qualitative multi-case study through the use of interviews with principals, focus groups of teachers, observations, and document analysis to gain deep, meaningful information to answer the questions concerning instructional leadership and mandated high-stakes testing. By accessing these data sources, the researcher produced multiple methods of data collection to strengthen the study (Denzin, 1970; Merriam, 1988; Yin & Moore, 1988). The combination of interviews, focus groups, observations and document analysis should present a well-defined image of how *NCLB* has impacted instructional leaders.

At all times, the researcher was aware of the rights and protection of the participants. All measures according to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) with the University of Missouri – Columbia were acknowledged. The gatekeeper’s permission

was obtained from the school district's central office according to IRB rules, prior to the gathering of any data. Finally, each participant received an informed consent that explained the rights and confidentiality pertaining to the study (see Appendix A).

Interview Protocol

Interviews were conducted at the site with each of the four principals in a one-on-one setting during a half-day site visit. Using a “structured format” of 10 open-ended and pre-established questions (Creswell, 2007) that were framed around the elements of instructional leadership as presented in the literature review (Smith & Andrews, 1989), this process took approximately 60 minutes to complete (Mertens, 2005, p. 386). While interviewing, the researcher assumed a “middle-ground position” and employed “moderate participation” (Creswell, 2007, p. 139; Mertens, 2005, p. 382). The interview, with the principals’ permission, was audio recorded to ensure a detailed account of the conversation and for an accurate transcription. During the interview and audio recordings, the researcher took extensive field notes. Prior to recording, the researcher gained permission from the participants including the use of the audio recordings. The use of these recordings reinforced the field notes or “jottings” (Creswell, 2007, p. 138) taken by the researcher and ensure the credibility of the data collected. As the researcher collected the data, she looked for patterns and themes brought about through rich stories and information based upon the opinions and understandings from the participant (Yin, 2003). In addition, the researcher looked for what was being said and what was not being said (Mertens, 2005). Finally, the interviewer assured the participant that the only people with access to the information gathered during the interview was the researcher and the doctoral advisor.

Focus Group Protocol

In addition to the interviews, focus groups were conducted to gain an insight into the teacher's perspective of the issues behind high-stakes accountability and its impact upon their instructional leader. Creswell (2007) stated that focus groups were best used when individuals would be hesitant to provide information in a one-on-one setting yet if groups were homogeneous and cooperative better information would be gathered. There were a total of four focus groups consisting of five to seven teachers that fit the qualifications in each group. Mertens (2005) and Morgan (1988) agreed that only a few groups are required when the research was controlled and investigative. The researcher spent half a day at the site where the focus groups were conducted at the site building after school hours. There were 5-7 open-ended questions focused on the topic of *NCLB*, high-stakes accountability and instructional leadership (Smith & Andrews, 1989). These questions were pre-arranged and were connected to the issues discussed during the interviews with the principals (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The interviewer looked for verbal and non-verbal cues as well as interactions among the group members (Mertens, 2005). The session took approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Every consideration was taken into account with respect to the teacher's time commitment. The session, with permission from the group members, was audio taped to ensure accurate documentation. Once again, the interviewer assumed a "middle-ground position" and moderately participated with the members of the focus group (Creswell, 2007, p. 139; Mertens, 2005). The members were informed that the researcher and the doctoral advisor were the only ones with access to the information gathered during the interview as not to skew the results. As with the interviews, prior permission was granted to use technology to gather information. Audio

recordings were used which enabled the researcher to take minimal notes thereby eliminating undo anxiety for the participants. This ensured credibility of the data that was collected (Creswell, 2007).

Observations

Observation provided additional information benefitting the study. Stake (1995) proposed, "...observations work the researcher toward greater understanding of the case" (p. 60). With the help of the gate-keeper, the researcher determined the participants (Creswell, 2007). The interaction between the researcher and the participants was balanced: congenial yet non-intrusive. Any written documentation was primarily focused on the descriptive and reflective observations witnessed by the researcher (Creswell, 2007). While observing, the researcher looked for any behaviors that showed meaning or were potentially symbolic to the participant (Merriam, 1988; Mertens). In addition, the researcher looked for signs of what was not happening "...especially if it ought to have happened" (Patton, 1980, p. 91). Simple nuances were the main objectives as the researcher observed the participants.

Human Subjects Protection and Other Ethical Considerations

Preauthorization from the Institutional Review Board (IRBs) from the University of Missouri – Columbia was used to guarantee the protection of all of the participants of the study (Appendix C). The researcher contacted each of the institutions to receive permission from the human subject representative prior to gaining informed consent. The informed consent provided the participant with the specific details concerning what it meant to be involved in the study such as the opportunity to withdraw from the study at

any time and the guidelines pertaining to the confidentiality of the data and analysis (see Appendix A).

Data Analysis

“Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations” (Stake, 1995, p. 71). The researcher carefully reviewed the components of the interviews, focus groups, and observations and then reassembled them while finding meaning and synthesis (Stake, 1995). The collection of multiple data source assisted in developing an understanding of the multiple realities that existed with these four school sited using the conceptual framework of instructional leadership.

Through a social constructivist lens, the researcher attempted to understand the multiple realities that existed between the researcher and participants as they pertain to instructional leadership and *NCLB* (Creswell, 2007). As an educator, the researcher has an interest in understanding the individual stories of the participants and how they connect to the broader school environment (Creswell, 2007) and through these stories, the intent of the researcher was to make sense of the meanings individuals attach to the world around them.

By preparing and organizing the data, finding themes and connections, and compiling the information into meaningful narrative, the researcher analyzed whether *NCLB* had, in fact, affected the role of the instructional leaders (Creswell, 2007) and their decision making. The researcher began by transcribing the audio tapes. Furthermore, the researcher added findings regarding body language while additional jottings found in the field notes were added to complete the interview and focus group picture (Creswell, 2007). Codes were constructed based on similar word choice, similarities and differences

between the interview and the focus groups, and metaphors and analogies (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1988; Mertens, 2005). These codes were used to create a cross-case analysis identifying associations among the variables and finding patterns or themes that made sense of the data (Creswell, 2007). The final step in the analysis process was to present the data, with the choices of “...text, tabular, or figure form...,” the researcher presented findings from the interviews, observations, and focus groups in a text form (Creswell, 2007, p. 154) and by providing figures for further analysis. Interjecting the participant’s personal beliefs, feelings, and accounts into a narrative format will aid in the analysis of the multi-case study, as Merriam (1998) commented, “...what makes them case studies is the narrative structure used to present the data” (p. 127).

Issues of Quality

Issues of quality were addressed incorporating techniques of credibility and dependability. Yin (2003) recommended the researcher “...identify issues within each case and then look for common themes that transcend the case” (p. 75). To guarantee credibility, Mertens (2005) suggested using “...member checks and triangulation” (p. 358). Steps were taken to provide the participants opportunity for input on the interviews and dialogue. Better known as “member checks,” the participants had the opportunity to double check and/or retract any information shared with the researcher (Mertens, 2005 p. 255). Specifically, Mertens (2007) considered member checks to be the most important measure when checking for credibility. In an attempt to establish a causal relationship, the researcher determined whether the various data sources used shared a connected relationship. This concept, referred to as triangulation, enhances credibility and reduces bias (Creswell, 2007, Mertens, 2005; 2007). Furthermore, dependability was initially

established by using audio taping, which the researcher used to recognize the nuances of the participants. This strategy provided reliability which, in qualitative studies, is known as dependability (Creswell, 2007).

Limitations

The limitations of this research were both internal and external and included: identical populations, limited timeframe for the study, and the researcher's familiarity with the topic. This study was conducted in two suburban school districts. A lack of diversity in choosing the schools may have altered the findings of the study as a limited demographic was accessed. However, by conducting multiple interviews and focus groups, the researcher hoped to lessen this limitation. The researcher attempted to respect the participants and limit the amount of time needed to accomplish the sessions. Lastly, the researcher, as an educator, was affected by the *NCLB* mandates and could have interjected personal bias. However, all efforts were made by the researcher to objectively recognize personal bias and limit input during interviews and focus groups.

Summary

A qualitative multi-case study was the most appropriate means for conducting a study of this nature. This investigation attempted to determine whether high-stakes accountability and the national mandates of *NCLB* have had an impact on the role of the instructional leaders and decision making. Multiple interviews and focus groups were conducted to gather data. Participants included both principals and teachers that were employed prior to 2006 and have been directly impacted by *NCLB*. Using open-ended questioning, the researcher listened to the dialogue, observed body language, and attempted to understand prior knowledge the participants possessed (Creswell, 2007).

Focused on the research questions, the researcher analyzed the data and looked for themes and connections.

Presented in Chapter Four are the presentation and analysis of data results framed by the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, conceptual framework and four research questions. A summary of the process of analysis and findings are included.

Presented in Chapter Five was a summary of the findings, conclusions, and implications for practice. In addition a comparison of the study and previous research was discussed as well as recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this investigation was to add to the body of knowledge concerning the impact of high-stakes accountability on instructional leadership and data-driven decision making. Through an analysis of “changing expectations, coupled with insufficient training and support,” (Alvoid & Black, Jr., 2014), it was the hope of the researcher to determine whether or not the role of the instructional leader was altered as a result of reform pressures. Through the lens of instructional leadership theory, one might argue “...the changing landscape of school leadership, most notably as a result of increased expectations around instructional improvement...” (Alvoid & Black, Jr., 2014, ¶7) has led to the pressures built around student achievement. During this reform era, particular attention has been given to data-driven decision making and its impact on every facet in education. With limited research of schools in an elementary setting, this research study presented the perceptions of administrators and educators on leadership characteristics and the educational environment created by high-stakes accountability.

Presented in this chapter is a review of the study design, data collection methods, conceptual underpinnings, research questions, and data analysis. Additionally, each of the four schools is described and an introduction of the principals and educator participants will also be presented. When applicable, factors unique to each school were highlighted. Discussed in the second section are the three themes that emerged from the data analysis and under each theme, sub-themes were identified and included in the discussion. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

Study Design

A qualitative multi-case study approach allowed the researcher to examine how principals and teachers were affected by tenets of the *No Child Left Behind Act* and high-stakes accountability (Creswell, 2007). It was the researcher's intent to explore the participants' thoughts, feelings and perceptions with respect to the implementation of these tenets (Mertens, 2005). For this research study, four single cases (i.e., individual subjects) as well as four focus groups (containing n=5-7 participants) were selected to "capture multiple realities" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 72) and open-ended, emerging data (Creswell, 2003). Each participant was purposefully selected (Creswell) through criterion-based sampling, which included their length of service as an elementary educator before and after the implementation of NCLB and regional location in a suburban school district (Merriam, 2002). Within each case study, the principals were interviewed, while the educators participated in a focus group at each of the participating elementary buildings.

Data Collection Methods

Before beginning the on-site interviews, the researcher secured permission from each district gatekeeper and respective school leaders to conduct research and to have access to faculty of the school meeting the study's criteria. The researcher then completed the University Institutional Review Board application, which included providing information about the purpose and extent of the study. Following approval from the University of Missouri-Columbia (see Appendix B), the researcher traveled to each site to begin collecting data. Informed consents were signed by all principal and educator participants (see Appendix A) prior to observations and interviews. Following the

interviews, participants received a verbatim transcript of their interview and were provided the opportunity to give feedback by modifying and/or clarifying their recorded responses through the procedure of member-checking (Creswell, 2003). Follow-up e-mail exchanges helped to further clarify the data. The data were triangulated through on-site audio-recorded interviews. Field observations of interactions among principals and educators were recorded in a field log and research journal (see Appendix E).

Conceptual Framework

For the purpose of this study, an instructional leadership lens was utilized to investigate the impact high-stakes accountability had on the roles of educators and administrators. Instructional leadership is defined as a multitude of relationships, behaviors, and responsibilities that directly impact student achievement (O'Donnell & White, 2005; Bottoms & Fry, 2009). Administrators and educators are directly responsible for students' performances (Hess & Kelly, 2007) and with the rigors of accountability from the principles of NCLB, educators are having to turn to new approaches such as data-driven decision making (King, 2002) and quick-paced instruction to meet the needs of students. Therefore, the focus of this study was to create a narrative of educators' feelings and beliefs concerning high-stakes accountability and its impact on instructional leadership.

Research Questions

Based on the conceptual underpinnings, the following research questions were formulated:

- (1) How has the issue of accountability, as framed by *NCLB*, impacted the role of elementary principals as instructional leaders?

- (2) How has the issue of accountability, as framed by *NCLB*, impacted the role of teachers as instructional leaders?
- (3) In what way, if any, do educators perceive high-stakes accountability as being influential in decision making, curriculum selection, and school goals?
- (4) What, if any, are some of the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing as perceived by principals and teachers?

Process of Data Analysis

Observations and field notes, gathered during visits to each site, provided direct perceptual data. Individual interviews were conducted with four principals at four different sites. In addition, focus groups were conducted with 5-7 teachers at each of the four different sites (n=5-7). Each participant received information about the research study, and an informed consent with a description of his or her rights. Audiotapes, made during each interview, were transcribed verbatim. The researcher shared copies of the transcription with interviewees, asking them to verify the accuracy of their words and intent. Analysis of each interview began following verification from the participants.

All data were examined and assigned the following codes (see Appendix F): Further codes included the following: principal 1 (P1), principal 2 (P2), principal 3 (P3), principal 4 (P4); educator 1 (E1), educator 2 (E2), educator 3 (E3), educator 4 (E4), educator 5 (E5), educator 6 (E6), educator 7 (E7), educator 8 (E8), educator 9 (E9), educator 10 (E10), educator 11 (E11), educator 12 (E12), educator 13 (E13), educator 14 (E14), educator 15 (E15), educator 16 (E16), educator 17 (E17), educator 18 (E18), educator 19 (E19), educator 20 (E20),

educator 21 (E21), and educator 22 (E22). The transcripts were reviewed multiple times to ensure accuracy and consistency in the coding of the transcriptions.

Settings

Site 1: McAllister Elementary School (pseudonym). The first site for this multi-case study was a suburban elementary public school located on the southwest section of the community. This school was a preschool through fifth grade school with a population of more than 400 students.

McAllister Elementary was originally built in 1965 but has received multiple renovations making it a friendly and safe environment. Upon entering the building, visitors were greeted with a door on the left that led to a bright and cheery office. The office staff was very welcoming and helpful. Visitors were asked to sign in and get a visitor's tag. The entryway to the school was decorated with charts and graphs depicting test scores and other data that showed student growth and progress. Once down the hallways of the school, student artwork and science fair projects lined the halls. The hallways were freshly painted and though not new, the building was comfortable and inviting. There were three hallways that were organized by grade levels. Varying degrees of décor in the classrooms were present with kindergarten being more animate than the fifth grade classrooms. Outside, the building was surrounded with playgrounds divided into grade level appropriateness. Each of the playgrounds had an eight-foot fence perimeter.

McAllister Elementary is a Title 1 school that ranks on the upper side of the diversity scale with 51% of the students being black, 26% of the students being Hispanic, and 17% of the students being white. In addition, almost 90% of the student's population

is on free and reduced lunch. According to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, in 2015, McAllister Elementary had an 87% attendance rate. The faculty at McAllister Elementary boasts an average of 15.8 years of service with 85.7% of them having a Master's Degree or higher. While disaggregated data shows that McAllister did not meet Average Yearly Progress (AYP) on the MAP test from 2007 to 2011 in either Communication Arts or Mathematics, according to recent data, scores from the Smarter Balanced Assessment ranked from 49% to 70% of students earning proficient or higher on the Communication Arts test and 28% to 49% earning proficient or higher on the Mathematics test in 2015 (DESE, 2015).

Site 2: Long Hill Elementary (pseudonym). The next site identified was also a suburban, public, elementary school but it was located in the northern parts of its district. Long Hill Elementary services 490 students in grades kindergarten through fourth.

Long Hill Elementary was the newest building of the investigated sites. Opening in 2006, it still had a fresh, clean, modern atmosphere. The entrance to the building was obvious by the landscaping and benches to greet visitors. Through the first set of doors there was a security system monitored by a school secretary. The building appeared extremely secure and the layout was the most advantageous from a security standpoint of the four investigated sites. Once in the doors, students and visitors were greeted with a calming environment. To the left was the office while potted plants, comfy chairs, a large foyer, and the American flag were on display to the right. Throughout the halls, student artwork and classwork lined the walls. As the building was fairly new, the halls were well-lit and the decor was up-to-date. The building was arranged in pods with each grade

level occupying a designated area. The classrooms were fairly compact but were well designed with built-in cabinets that complimented the décor.

As Long Hill Elementary was not a Title 1 school, it had the lowest free and reduced lunch rate of 26.2% of the sites identified in the study. The student population was divided into 74% white and 14% black with a high 94% attendance rate. The Long Hill faculty averaged 10.3 years in the classroom with a surprising 70.8% of the teachers holding a Master's Degree or higher. The disaggregated data showed that Long Hill students started out strong on the Communication Arts MAP test, meeting AYP 2006 - 2009 though the projected goal was narrowly missed in 2010 and 2011. Yet, students consistently met AYP in mathematics for all years given except one (2009). According to the Smarter Balanced assessment, Communication Arts scores were strong with scores ranging from 59% to 70% while Math scores ranged from 56% to 60% meeting proficient or better (DESE, 2015).

Site 3: Jackson Elementary (pseudonym). The third site investigated in the study was a suburban, public, elementary school located in the southern part of the district, isolated from the community by a large highway. Jackson Elementary was home to 359 students in kindergarten through fifth grade.

Jackson Elementary set attendance as a primary building goal. As students and visitors approached the door, there were signs and bulletin boards announcing the importance of coming to school each day. Through the locked doors of the building, there was an office on the left and a small foyer filled with plants, benches and artwork and a large American flag. Though the building was older, fresh paint and carpet made the environment welcoming. The building was had two large hallways on two levels with a

smaller hallway off the entry foyer. Classrooms were arranged according to grade level. The classrooms were large with spacy closets to hold resources and supplies. There was artwork and classwork displayed throughout the building.

Like several of the other sites, Jackson Elementary was a Title 1 school with 81% of the students on free and reduced lunch. The student demographics was more evenly distributed than the other sites with 40% black and 18% Hispanic and 32% white. As attendance was a high priority at this school, the attendance rate was high at an average of 91%. The day the researcher was observing, the attendance was 100%. It was the fourteenth time the students had reached this goal during the 2015-2016 school year. They were rewarded with a party. The Jackson faculty averaged 13.2 years in the classroom with 50% of the teachers holding a Master's Degree or higher. The disaggregated data showed that Jackson Elementary students were successful in the early years on the Communication Arts MAP test, meeting AYP in 2006, 2008, and 2009 but missing the mark in 2007, 2010, and 2011. Unfortunately, mathematics had poorer scores as students only recorded two years having met AYP. According to the Smarter Balanced assessment, Communication Arts scores were consistent with scores ranging from 45% to 67% while Math scores ranged from 45% to 56% meeting proficient or better (DESE, 2015).

Site 4: Oakvale Elementary (pseudonym). The final site identified was also a suburban, public, elementary school, located in the southern parts of its district, again, separated from the major heart of the district by a large highway. Being the smallest of the schools researched, Oakvale Elementary serviced 317 students in grades kindergarten through fourth.

Not only was Oakvale Elementary the smallest site, it was the oldest site investigated. However, the building possessed old world charm and was well-maintained. The entrance to the building was wide and spacious. It also had secure doors that needed access by a secretary. Through the first set of doors was a security system that was monitored by a school secretary. Past the second set of doors, students and visitors were greeted with a calming environment. To the left was the office and to the right was the entrance to the gymnasium flanked by seating and a fountain. Throughout the halls, student artwork and classwork lined the walls. The hallways were a series of ramps and though very small, there appeared to be ample room. The building had two long hallways that housed the classrooms, media center, and the cafeteria.

Oakvale Elementary was a Title 1 school, yet it only had a free and reduced lunch rate of 37.2%. The student population was the least diverse with 91% of the students being white. The Oakvale faculty averaged 10.7 years in the classroom and within this study, boasts the highest teacher education rate at 78.3% of the teachers holding a Master's Degree or higher. According to DESE's data, the attendance rate for Oakvale Elementary students was an impressive 91%. The disaggregated data showed that Oakvale students started out strong on the Communication Arts MAP test, meeting AYP in 2006 - 2008 though the projected goal was missed in 2009 and 2010. Just like Long Hill Elementary, Oakvale students consistently met AYP in mathematics for all years given except one (2009). According to the Smarter Balanced assessment, Communication Arts scores were consistent with scores ranging from 48% to 66% while Math scores were lower ranging from 41% to 45% meeting proficient or better (DESE, 2015). It should be noted that when the 2009 data was published, Oakvale Elementary was

publically shamed during a district-wide assembly for not meeting AYP. The data will identify what types of actions took place in the building as a result of being discredited in this manner.

Participants

A total of four public school principals (n=4) and 22 public school teachers (n=22) accepted the invitation to participate in the study. One principal originated from each of the aforementioned sites and between five and seven educators per site formed the focus groups. All of the participants were veteran elementary educators having taught at least ten years. As the following profiles will illustrate, each participant had rich K-6 experiences and personal backgrounds.

Principal 1: The first principal participant, Amye Ross (pseudonym), had been an administrator at McAllister Elementary for sixteen years. At a school with 90% free and reduced lunch rate, Ross maintained:

I always had a passion for students who...well, we have a more diverse population or we have higher percentage of students on free and reduced lunch and that sort of thing so that's where I always wanted to go. So, when that opportunity opened up here, that's where I went.

Though there was a diverse demographic for McAllister Elementary, Principal Ross made it clear that she loved her job regardless of the challenges that her building faced:

I was going to say I can't imagine doing something that you're not passionate about or that you don't love and I'm thankful for that. Even on the bad days, I say you know, I love my job and I can't imagine doing other things...

Nonetheless, after 20 years in the field, Principal Ross planned to retire at the end of the 2015-2016 school year.

Principal 2: The second principal participant, Dr. Don Dunning (pseudonym), had been a principal for ten years with 6 of those years at Long Hill Elementary. He had been a physical education teacher prior to being an administrator but decided his passion was in leading others. “The reason I was hired was all about Professional Learning Communities (PLC) because I had gone to that training. So, that was appealing to the X School District because they were just kicking off and starting that.” Dunning, an advocate of the PLC process, found his knowledge in supporting collaboration and teachers had molded his belief system which aided him to be a better administrator. He enjoyed being part of the “groundbreaking structure of a PLC.”

Principal 3: The third principal participant, Ashlie Kern (pseudonym), was an elementary principal at Jackson Elementary School. Principal Kern had been a principal at her current school for eight years. Prior to that, she was an assistant principal for three years at a different local elementary school. It was noted that Kern was passionate about student engagement and getting kids to school. But it was Principal Kern’s love of education that stood out the most:

I think one of the big characteristics is a love of learning that I’ve always had in and saw myself, in that way, and as a person that loves to learn then I love to see other people learn. In that respect how can I help others to learn...?

Though Principal Kern planned on retiring following the current school year, she had not lost sight of her important role:

I just love being with kids, I love being with teachers. I was in and out of the classrooms a lot, and not that I ever kind of had in my mind that I would go into administration, but just the fact that I love to be with them and enjoyed watching teachers and watching them teach.

Principal 4: The fourth and final participant was Andy Harrington (pseudonym). Mr. Harrington, the principal at Oakvale Elementary School, had been an administrator for 17 years. Before accepting this role, Principal Harrington was a fourth grade teacher but was encouraged by his superiors to become a principal:

Prior to 2006, I was never going to become a principal but I had managed specialty sales. I think they looked at all males in elementary...for that (becoming a principal) but I did have skills of managing, how to communicate with people, and get people to do things.

As Harrington was in sales prior to becoming an educator, he commented that this business background was where he gleaned his perspective on educational reform:

I have a pretty different perspective on that because when I came into teaching...I was 30 years old and it was a second career. MAP had just started its first year...it was a high-stakes test. I had done other things that if you failed on a high-stakes test; you were fired.

Principal Harrington used his success in business to assist his school during the new high-stakes accountability era.

In addition to principal participants, there were 22 elementary educators that provided input for the study through a focus group. All of the focus group members were women. Eight of the participants were African American which was in alignment with the minority representation of the four student bodies. All of the members had been in education for ten or more years.

Educator 1: The first educator, E1 was a third grade teacher at McAllister Elementary. She had taught elementary school for 19 years.

Educator 2: The second educator, E2, was a kindergarten teacher at McAllister Elementary. She had been a teacher for 15 years in an elementary setting.

Educator 3: The third educator, E3 was also a kindergarten teacher at McAllister Elementary. She had been in the field for 17 years.

Educator 4: E4, a special education teacher, was the next participant at McAllister Elementary. She had taught elementary school for 13 years.

Educator 5: The next participant, E5, had been in an elementary setting for 27 years. For 22 years, she was a school counselor at McAllister Elementary and she was a teacher at another building for five years.

Educator 6: The sixth educator was E6. She was the reading teacher at McAllister Elementary and she had been in the field of elementary education for 28 years.

Educator 7: The final participant at McAllister Elementary was E7. E7 was a third grade teacher but had also taught sixth grade to complete her 22 years in education.

Educator 8: The first participant from Long Hill Elementary, E8, was a K-4 music teacher. She had been in the field for 12 years.

Educator 9: The second educator, E9, had taught third grade at Long Hill Elementary for her entire career. She had been a teacher for ten years.

Educator 10: E10, was the third educator from Long Hill Elementary. She had also been a teacher for ten years having experience in both kindergarten and fourth grade.

Educator 11: The fourth educator, E11, was a fourth grade teacher at Long Hill Elementary. She had been teaching at Long Hill for ten years with an additional year at a different building in the district.

Educator 12: The fifth and final participant from Long Hill Elementary was E12. E12 had not only taught kindergarten for twelve years, she had also taught a year in first grade.

Educator 13: The first educator from Jackson Elementary, E13, had been in education for 18 years. E13 had a multitude of positions from working with traditional students in grades one and five to being a pull-out teacher in kindergarten, second, third, and fourth grades.

Educator 14: E14, the next participant from Jackson Elementary, had taught in kindergarten, first, second, fifth, and sixth grades. She had been in education for 19 years.

Educator 15: The third educator from Jackson Elementary was E15. E15 had been in education for forty-one years. During her 25 years as an elementary teacher, she had taught every grade from kindergarten to eighth grade. Prior to that, she had managed a day care for sixteen years. E15 was retiring at the end of the year.

Educator 16: The next participant from Jackson Elementary, E16, had also been teaching for 25 years. She had taught second grade, was the Title One Coordinator, and was also the School Improvement Specialist.

Educator 17: The final educator from Jackson Elementary was E17. E17, during her 22 years in education, had taught third grade and was currently the reading teacher.

Educator 18: The first educator from Oakvale Elementary, E18, was both a traditional classroom teacher and a music teacher. She had been in the field for a total of eleven years.

Educator 19: The second educator, E19, taught a combined thirteen years in both fourth grade and special education at Oakvale Elementary.

Educator 20: E20 was a kindergarten, first grade, third grade, and fourth grade teacher at Oakvale Elementary. She had been a teacher for 19 years.

Educator 21: The next educator from Oakvale Elementary was E21. She had taught first grade for her entire 18 years in the field of education.

Educator 22: The final educator, E22, was a digital learning teacher at Oakvale Elementary. She had been in the field for 22 years.

Themes

Using data set and predetermined codes, the following themes emerged: 1) *Changing Culture*, with a subtheme of Collaboration; and 2) *Changing Evidence* with subthemes of Data-Driven Input and Purposeful Goals; and 3) *Increased Rigor* with subthemes of Aggressive Pace and Performance and Individualized Instruction. These themes provide an understanding of the impact high-stakes accountability and data-driven decision making has had on public school principals and educators.

Changing Culture

Collaboration

In this study, change was identified in several ways but the subtheme that was most acknowledged regarding the changing culture was the impact high-stakes accountability had on teachers and their collaborative natures. Collaboration provided the opportunity to create a collective environment, because “...true collaboration is best achieved through a structured process for exchanging insights and content...” (Vislocky, 2013). When discussing collaboration, participants divided the conversation into two separate timelines: partnership prior to high-stakes accountability and partnership as a result of high-stakes accountability. As the educators reminisced, the conversation

continually returned to the nature of teamwork prior to the implementation of testing with sanctions and what that process looked like as a result of accountability in education.

Teachers were in agreement when one directly stated, “You did independent lessons. We did not collaborate” while another admitted there was “...no expectation for collaboration.” Administrators concurred with the teachers regarding a lack of focused collaborative planning. Principal Ross stated, “I think we have always had that and known the importance of having teachers being able to talk to one another and team together and the value of not being isolated so much in their classrooms...” Yet the implementation of accountability changed the focus of this collaborative process...Some teachers regarded themselves as collaborative though it may not have been purposeful. One teacher illustrated how collaboration existed but only superficially, “It was a little intimidating at times...she was full of ideas...but it looks like “Yeah, I’m doing this. You’re more than welcome to join me” and we went along for the ride.” Another educator concurred when she recalled how collaboration was viewed prior to NCLB, “...here’s what I’m doing... they could either take it or leave it.” However, since the implementation of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), teachers are not working in isolation and are working together, using student learning, to meet the rigorous requirements.

Principal Kern positively responded to the changes in collaboration:

We get it, so what can we do, and how do we make sure that we’re all in this together, supporting each other...we’re not in our room and closing the door...how do we build trust with each other and how do we provide time for them?

As change agents, administrators were collectively looking for ways to improve collaboration. Combatting time restraints, opposition to shared leadership, and the attitude of “this is the way we have always done it” took extraordinary efforts. Again,

Principal Kern remarked, “I think that’s something that, number one, just trying to find the support, and again not letting teachers feel like they’re all by themselves out there.”

When changing the nature of working together there was administrative agreement regarding the power that intentionality had on collaboration:

Just think about how we can improve that lesson and make it from good to great, you know, if we had even more intentionality...but what if we really did allow teachers the time to really dig deep and think about the intentionality...

Working together was a notable improvement with regard to the impact high-stakes testing had on education. As collaboration has been shown to improve student achievement, “Not only will effective collaboration improve teacher performance, it will improve student performance,” (Perez, 2015), it has attempted to satisfy the rigors of the NCLB era. Principal Dunning noted, “With many ideas comes a great idea. With many eyes, together looking at a standard, whether you are deconstructing that, it is only going to help with that planning process.”

Aggressive Performance

Furthermore, just like the students, the majority of teachers agreed they needed time when implementing new ideas. A revolving door of new initiatives had added to the performance challenges that teachers encountered. One of the educators spoke for the group:

...we tried lots of stuff at one time. We were being thrown five new things each year and we’d only try them for a year and then we’d change and we’re trying another five new things...we were never given the chance to get good at something, because change takes more than a year.

Nevertheless, the study participants did acknowledge that there had also been positive consequences as a result of the rigorous performance efforts. Principal Ross justified the importance of performance pressure, “You need to have a little pressure, but

followed by support.” Many of the teachers were in agreement. One educator, who was struggling to find a positive outcome stated, “I think a positive thing – I think it has driven us to the edge but in a good way, that we’re always trying to be better...if it doesn’t work you don’t do it the same way twice. You want to do it better.” In addition, another teacher confirmed that a teacher’s new job is, “...moving more away from just building up the child as a human person, whereas now, I got to figure out this kid’s mind...get them into the critical thinking and higher order thinking...” High-stakes accountability has led to focused instruction versus looking at the big picture. The study findings supported the idea that though stressful, the accountability era has improved instruction by creating teachers who want to be better every year, and who want to work together in a purposeful collaboration process.

Changing Evidence

Data-driven Input

The school leaders in this study collectively celebrated the implementation of data and its driving force on every facet of education. They were unanimous in establishing the credibility of the benefits of data not only on student achievement, but on every academic decision made in a school setting. Consequently, during the interviews, much of the time was spent on the discussion of data and its driving force. Principal Ross conjectured:

And I just think that after 2006, you started seeing more where the focus was really on student achievement and basing all student growth on that on data...I mean, the data informs our decisions...No Child Left Behind has really impacted decisions because everything you do practically is based on data.

Each of the administrators viewed collecting and analyzing data as the catalyst for reinventing education based upon the tenets of NCLB. Though collecting data has been

an approach educators have used since the turn of the century, data is now being “used.” Berhardt (2003, p. 29) commented, “Gathering data for its own sake is counterproductive and often results in “analysis paralysis.” The goal of using data to improve learning for all students should always be paramount.” Data were directly tied to the collaboration piece when confronting the rigors of high-stakes testing. Teachers examining the data in a timely manner was a major focus during collaboration time. This immediate analysis changed how instruction was performed and ultimately impacted student achievement. Collecting data were no longer the only goal; discussing the results and the steps that needed to be taken as a result of the data were the objective. Principal Dunning noted:

When I think of my job today, I put myself in a situation to always stay on top of curriculum and that is not just looking at data but it is being engrossed in those conversations with teachers about what is working and what isn’t working. “Let’s look at this assessment.” “What did you change as a result of the data?” Everything we do, we try to make it data-driven as possible and aligned and focused to everything that we are doing. If it is just random, it’s probably not going to work. If it’s going to help us accomplish our purpose, meet our goals, then let’s do that. Yeah!

Principal Harrington concurred that disaggregating data was no longer about the final test. It was about the process to get to the state assessment, “It caused us to look at every piece of data we had. We took a longer, harder look at it to see we needed to change after first quarter, after second quarter, instead of getting to the end assessments.”

On the other hand, the teachers saw the implementation of data through a different lens. Though the administrators viewed data as a valuable support system, the teachers viewed the process at times as invasive and counterproductive. A teacher at Oakvale Elementary commented:

...we’re doing constant data and so much so that there’s not a lot of time for teaching. We get to the point where we have to turn around to do data before a normal kid could have the time and knowledge to actually make it.

The data collecting was not as significant to the educators that were supposed to be using it. Instead of using the data to drive instruction, the teachers conclusively regarded the data collection process as “just one more thing.” The day to day compilation of each student’s progress seemed to be getting in the way of actual instruction. Many of the teachers in the study believed data had become quintessential contrary to the original goal of student achievement. “Everything in our building seems to focus around that [data]. It’s the center and everything rather than people.” Nonetheless, the research supports that data collection and understanding what the data is telling about learning is beneficial throughout the educational process. According to Van Barneveld (2008):

The use of data to drive educational decision making results in changes in teacher practice and school culture. Teachers report greater differentiation of instruction, greater collaboration among faculty, increased sense of teacher efficacy and improved identification of students’ learning needs as outcomes of data use.

So until the educators had an understanding of the use of the data, the process seemed cumbersome. But once the educators understood the focus of the data analysis, the benefits were noted, as one educator expressed, “Now that we are understanding the purpose of the data collection with the focus on student learning, we see the value.”

Purposeful Goals

In addition to the use of data to drive reform, educational goal setting has impacted how educators, schools, and districts operate effectively. Both teachers and administrators in this study overwhelmingly supported the use of goals and in contrast to the mix review on the use of data, this changing evidence was well received. Westerberg (2009, p.45) noted:

The process makes intuitive sense: decide where you're going, establish performance goals, periodically assess students to gauge their progress via those outcomes and goals, look at the results, and do something different in your instructional goals if the results aren't to your liking.

Looking back to a time prior to high-stakes accountability, the majority of educators in the study could not remember the practice of meaningful goal setting. Those that did recall or were privy to such methods noted they had little impact on student achievement.

Principal Kern remarked:

I'm gonna say if there was a goal that was connected to student achievement, it was very broad. It seemed like I remember goals more around positive climate, safe and clean buildings...was school specific and not necessarily connected to the district...Now they are very specific, to the degree where you do have data that supports...you have measurable objectives that are connected to what your goal is...

Conversely some of the teachers were less convinced that school goals existed before the accountability era. One teacher posited, "I don't ever recall a school goal," while another questioned, "Did we have school goals? If we did, I didn't know what they were..."

Principal Harrington backed up the teacher's observations: "The biggest difference is I can't even tell you what my goals were in the beginning. You know, (laughing) to be honest with you. Whereas now, it is such a part of our every day job."

There are various facets of goal setting in the educational forum. From teacher performance to mission and visions, education has embraced setting and striving to achieve goals. As with collaboration, it is the intentionality that makes it work. One of the educators stated, "Now it's more intentional and the focus is different..." The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) affirmed its commitment to the value of goals in 2013 with the implementation of the Teacher Standards Continuum. In this document, DESE defined a distinguished teacher as one who, "Leads colleagues in

discussions of instructional goals..." In the attempt to attain this target, many of the educators in the study agreed that the mission and vision was a positive consequence due to the accountability process. "Now we have a mission and a vision and before it was just a list of ideas, really." The direction it gives the educators is appreciated and embraced. As one teacher noted, "I'm proud to be a part of this. I'm happy that my kids get to also be in a school like this because I know that they will never slip through..." Principal Harrington summed up the usefulness of goal setting, "We do a better job of using formative assessments to guide our instruction towards shorter term goals than just long term goals...it's much more useful and because of that we can react much quicker than we could in the past."

Increased Rigor

Aggressive Pace

The majority of the study participants were in agreement concerning the unintended consequences of high-stakes accountability. Through the research, it was identified that a subtheme depicting the rigors of pace emerged. The negative implications that were derived from the research (Lambert & McCarthy, 2006) provided a rich narrative regarding the impact that high-stakes accountability had on students, teachers, and the school climate. One of the teachers elucidated "There initially was a lot of panic." Principal Harrington agreed, "It really can be a pressure cooker..."

Unfortunately, all of the study participants were in agreement that the students were the ones that suffered the most in an environment of aggressive pace. One counselor reported that as a result of accelerated instruction, "...I've seen more anxious[ness] and anxiety in students..." This rigorous instructional pace has not always been in the

forefront of high-stakes accountability. As one faculty member noted, “The requirements are so high now, that whether it’s through discipline or they simply just fell apart...” students are not keeping up. Another teacher remarked that under normal circumstances, “Some kids just need the time and we don’t give it to them.” Yet another educator concurred, “...I think we’ve pressured the kids too...we don’t see the child as a whole child...we see them sometimes as a number...” On a positive note, Principal Harrington believed that it has always been the district’s goal to “not stress out and [have] kids not stressed out...[With] that type of thing, our district has come a long way.” Yet he ended the thought with his concerns about the impact this pace and pressure has had on the children, “I’m worried that there’s a certain generation out there that’s going to look back on their childhood and wonder.”

Within the subtheme of aggressive pace and pressure, both administrators and educators in the study agreed that though rigorous, the addition of sanctions, high-stakes testing, accelerated pace, and a constant barrage of new initiatives had created a climate of uncertainty which led to stress. “While several factors contribute to teachers’ heightened stress, a significant amount of stress results from high-stakes accountability systems” (Lambert & McCarthy, 2006). Looking back to the beginning of the sanctions era, Principal Harrington recalled one beginning-of-the-year convocation. As a Title 1 school, the stakes for meeting Average Yearly Progress (AYP) were more rigorous. Oakvale Elementary came in shy of missing the overall requirement of AYP. Prior to the all-district convocation, Principal Harrington was informed that the data were going to be posted on the gym wall for everyone to see. “I was told that it was going to happen and I said “Don’t do it.” I said, “No good can come from this,” and there were hard feelings for

years..." Harrington saw the danger in "penalizing when you should be encouraging."

Principal Dunning reinforced the admonition

... I think you have to be mindful of the balance between supporting your teachers and supporting ASC [the district]. So, how can I support the district but also support the teachers? Sometimes you have to figure out a way to keep it from being us versus them.

On the other hand, Principal Kern attempted to find a solution to the lack of support her teachers were initially feeling after the implementation of NCLB. "That's when I absolutely enlist the troops. I kind of felt like we're going to war." Yet, trying to understand where the pressure was coming from, Kern admitted, "The negative is, just the pressure...I think after a while, people start questioning, gosh I just feel like I'm working, working, working so hard and what gets slighted is their personal lives..." This is where the teachers agreed wholeheartedly.

Even though reform enhanced collaboration that created an environment where the teachers worked together to find the best ways to instruct, there was still so much to do; there was never enough time. One teacher commented with heartfelt emotion:

Teachers are completely worn-out. Sometimes, just physically ill with the amount of work that has to be done and before [2006] I really don't feel where I had to make decisions between my family and work. Now, I see everybody at this table having to do that every day.

Recognizing that his teachers are committed, Principal Dunning purported:

But at the end of the day, teachers say "My name is on those reports..." We still have to respond to what the data says but do it in a way that is not overly intrusive to where it causes a lot of distress.

Individualized Instruction

Though there has been a multitude of negativity surrounding the tenets of NCLB, the educators and administrators in this study unequivocally praised and highlighted the

positive outcomes resulting from the high-stakes atmosphere. Principal Dunning ascertained:

...as far as NCLB, we can cuss and discuss all the pros and cons of that law but what it did was, and what was good out of that was, it really forced us at a much higher level to really be reflective practitioners from inside the classroom...making sure we are focusing on the right things.

The findings gleaned from this study showed that individualized instruction for students is at the forefront of this reflective practice. Both the administrators and the teachers agreed that as a direct result from high-stakes accountability, improved learning is taking place. Principal Harrington acknowledged, "I think overall education has changed for the positive...it has caused us to really look at what works and what doesn't work." Though frequently regarded as a negative occurrence, it is the accountability that drives the change. Principal Kern supported this theory:

Not all children learn the same...we have to look at differentiation and we have to look at how we are being knowledgeable of all of our students in our classroom...where they're at and how the teacher is meeting all of those needs...we need to be held accountable because we're everything to children, in developing their future for whatever they're going to become out there in the world. We have to make sure that we provide everything we can for them.

The teachers in this study agreed that prior to the 2006 sanctions, the focus was on the whole body of learners versus individualized instruction. All of the participants supported the notion that individualization was a positive change when improving student achievement. One of the veteran teachers remarked, "Before I just stood up and lectured and talked so I felt I was the main focus of the classroom but now with small group and centers and everything...I don't feel like "I'm that." Everybody look at me." Another teacher commented, "Now it's making sure the kids learn this, this, this, and this. It's a lot more individualized." Yet another teacher contributed:

It's kind of almost become a car mechanic because every kid in front of you is a student who needs to be diagnosed, broken down into parts, fixed, put back together but not in a negative way. I think there is something really amazing about that as long as it doesn't become too clinical which I'm afraid it has at this point. We're so quick to fix it that we don't just enjoy the momentum...

Though veteran educators may still long for the day when teaching was whole group with less responsibility, this study supports the perception that they also embrace the benefits that accountability has brought forth. One teacher affirmed, "I miss the fun but I like to know where each kid is, helping each kid meet all the goals and helping them grow." A teacher concluded, "I think maybe one positive might be that we know and understand our learners to a higher degree than we ever have before...now I know them and how to reach them."

Summary

The study design, data collection methods, conceptual underpinnings, research questions, and process of data analysis were discussed in Chapter Four. In addition, a description of each school setting and an introduction of the four principal participants as well as the 22 educators were presented. Within Chapter Four, the use of a socialist constructivist lens alongside a multiple realities focus explored educators' perceptions in regard to the impact of high-stakes accountability and three themes were presented. Discussed in Chapter Five are the discussions and conclusions on the data analysis. Additionally, presented in Chapter Five are the implications and recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative, multi-case study examined the role of the instructional leader and the impact that role had on student achievement during times of high-stakes accountability. Serving as the conceptual framework, instructional leadership theory provided a platform to assess whether or not there was a relationship between instructional leaders and student achievement and to what degree high-stakes environments may have played a role (O'Donnell & White, 2005). The data were triangulated using member-checking, rich and thick description, clarification of researcher bias, and the presentation of negative or opposing viewpoints (Creswell, 2003). From the data, three themes emerged: 1) *Changing Culture*, with a subtheme of Collaboration and Aggressive Performance; and 2) *Changing Evidence* with subthemes of Data-Driven Input and Purposeful Goals; and 3) *Increased Rigor* with subthemes of Aggressive Pace and Individualized Instruction.

Within Chapter Five, a discussion of the limitations, findings and conclusions based on the data analysis were discussed. Furthermore, the implications for practice and recommendations for future study were reviewed. A qualitative approach provided understanding through life experiences of veteran educators and administrators by offering insight of the impact high-stakes accountability had on instruction and student achievement.

Limitations

As noted by Flick (2009) acknowledging the limitations has always been taken as an important aspect of qualitative research. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the researcher acknowledged the existing limitations.

An initial limitation of the study was a lack of diverse populations. When conducting research from a social constructivists' lens, the researcher interacted with participants to "...construct the meaning of the situation" and acknowledged that prior experiences and opinions in the interpretation of the data existed (Creswell, 2003, p. 21). This study was limited to public, elementary administrators that were principals, both prior to and after 2006, and public, elementary school teachers that were educators prior to and after 2006. This resulted in the population being drawn from two suburban districts, thus limiting the transferability of the results. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research was better suited to interpret data versus generalize the findings while Creswell (2007) asserted a thick, rich description should be analyzed to create an "adequate database [for] readers [to] be able to determine how closely their situations match, and thus whether findings can be transferred" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 29). Flick suggested "doing a series of case studies" to eliminate the problem of generalizations (p. 175). Thus the use of the participant's voices through rich descriptions minimized this limitation.

The use of interviews as a collection instrument also led to limitations in this study. Certain limitations can occur when employing the interviewing method as a means of data collection. Flick (2009) recommended the use of specific coding procedures to rectify this, which was done with the data. In addition, participants may be reluctant to share deep insight especially if the researcher does not have enough distance "to ask real

questions and to explore, not to share assumptions” (Merriam, p.87). Moreover, Creswell suggested the researcher “systematically reflect on who he or she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study” (p. 182). Through the use of field notes, the researcher was able to step back with the data and reflect.

Finally, the researcher, as an active educator, had been directly affected by high-stakes accountability and data-driven instruction. Fink (2006) recommended the researcher to review their own values and “check own biases” (p. 20). Thereby the researcher systematically reflected and objectively recognized these personal biases, limiting input during interviews and focus groups.

Discussion of the Findings

Presented in this section are the findings of the research study which examined the impact of high-stakes accountability on instructional leadership. The focus of this research was to analyze how veteran educators’ and administrators’ perceive their roles during this high-stakes accountability era. Viewing these findings through the lens of instructional leadership, questions were developed based upon four areas of strategic action that instructional leaders should implement: providing and participating in professional development, improving instruction, providing and abiding by collective school goals, and supporting one another through viable presence and collaboration (Smith & Andrews, 1989). With the intention of improving student performance (Blasé and Blasé, 2000; Flath, 1989; Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger, 2005; NAESP, 2001; Portin & Shen, 1998), these instructional leadership qualities were analyzed and through rich description, examples, and perceptions, the views of the participants emerged. The

purpose was to determine if instructional leadership was altered as a result of high-stakes accountability.

The following three themes related to the impact of high-stakes accountability on instructional leadership emerged as data were analyzed: Changing Culture, Changing Evidence, Increased Rigor. Within the context of this study, as derived from the conceptual underpinnings, the researcher sought to answer the following questions:

- 1) How has the issue of accountability, as framed by *NCLB*, impacted the role of elementary principals as instructional leaders?
- 2) How has the issue of accountability, as framed by *NCLB*, impacted the role of teachers as instructional leaders?
- 3) In what way, if any, do educators perceive high-stakes accountability testing influence decision making, curriculum selection, and school goals?
- 4) What, if any, are some of the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing as perceived by principals and teachers?

Within Chapter 4, a summary of the major concepts was summarized from the data. Furthermore, the literature review served as guide to interpret the data.

How has the issue of accountability, as framed by NCLB, impacted the role of elementary principals as instructional leaders?

Over the course of the data analysis, consensus emerged among the principal participants concerning both negative and positive role changes due to high-stakes accountability. Administrators identified the complexities of the position both prior to 2006, before NCLB sanctions took effect, and after 2006.

Regardless of the obstacles, such as increased pressure many of the participants encountered, they all agreed that there was a marked change in the principal's role, instructional leadership, and school performance expectations. Principal Kern posited:

Prior to 2006, I feel like principal's roles were more managerial. It was managing the building and managing student discipline and managing how classrooms are and schedules and things like that. It was really just the flow of the building. I don't know that it was tied a lot to instruction.

While the traditional role of the principal had previously focused around management (Dressler, 2001), a shift from managerial leadership to instructional leadership was encouraged by the high-stakes accountability movement (Phillips, 2010). Though the day-to-day management responsibilities did not disappear, the focus of the newly revived instructional leader became dependent upon student achievement (Hallinger, 2005; Mangin, 2007). As a result, successful schools were ones that incorporated strong instructional leadership (Andrews, bosom, & Bosom, 1991).

Once the sanctions of 2006 began to take effect, best practices were critical for survival. If a school could not prove academic success, it would not meet AYP and as a result, receive limited federal funding. As this success was measured through the use of data (*NCLB*, 2001), schools either met the mark or they did not. Principal Ross recalled:

...after 2006, you started seeing where the focus was really pushed on student achievement and basing all that on data...not that we didn't pay attention to data prior to 2006, but it was like there was more of a focus on "How do you know where you're going?"

Similarly, Principal Kern noted:

Since 2006, I think that that has completely shifted. I think the role of the principal since then and now is definitely more an instructional leader...principals have to have that knowledge and be able to work with the teachers in making sure they are experts at their craft.

However, the administrators were in agreement that these reforms created a stressful environment as a building principal. Again, Kern admitted:

If anything, it has put more pressure on my role as the building principal...if our kids don't perform, we look at ourselves. I'm the building principal. I look at that as, "Oh my gosh. Did I do something to not prepare my teachers...I must take ownership of that."

Yet in spite of this pressure, all four of the participants supported the changes to their roles. The addition of sanctions and added responsibility did not waver them. There were a myriad of comments pertaining to the love of learning and the inspiration to build up their faculties. Principal Kern remarked:

If anything, the focus characteristically really hasn't changed because we always wanted to learn, be better, and improve yourself...arguably it affects everybody and now you must bring everybody with you to improve them as well.

That is what instructional leadership is all about, not only improving the achievement of your students, but developing your teachers along the way. Instructional leadership is now the focus of creating a culture of collaboration and goals of learning.

How has the issue of accountability, as framed by NCLB, impacted the role of teachers as instructional leaders?

Through analysis of the data, the role of the teacher was viewed by both principal and teacher as being impacted by high-stakes accountability. Most of the educator participants agreed that their role had drastically changed in the last decade. The participants created an enumeration of characteristics that teachers need to possess to be considered successful. Attributes such as transparent, collaborative, nurturing, and a motivator were on the list of teacher traits, which was supported in Kidwells' (2015) research. While many of the desirable skills of teaching have not varied overtime, many of these traits were modified or emphasized after the implementation of high-stakes

accountability. The findings showed that the educators overwhelmingly believed that stress resulting in some teachers questioning their own confidence, had caused a shift in teachers' perceptions of their role. Yet, unexpectedly, many of the teachers found the role changes to be of value. One veteran educator remarked, "You always want to get better. You're always wanting to be stronger, better, more instructionally sound in everything you do." Another teacher stated, "It pushes me. I don't ever want to be the one who's the weakest. I am constantly pushing myself to be a better teacher..."

In the review of related literature, Gray (2009) discussed the new set of responsibilities that teachers face from data handler to critical thinker. Research further revealed that a teacher's role "increased, intensified, and expanded" as the high-stakes environment impacted student achievement (Valli & Buese, 2007).

As the literature revealed, instructional leadership theory employs shared leadership in its description (Ubbin & Hughes, 2011). With that in mind, all four of the administrators agreed that the role of the principal was no longer a job that could be conducted independently. Schumaker and Sommers (2001) elucidated, "The job is too big for one person." As a result, all the principal participants employed some sort of shared leadership through the lens of instructional leadership. Principal Harrington asserted, "We can only go so far with the person in the office leading the building. Sharing through teacher leadership is what has really improved our school culture." Principal Ross concurred, "I think you've got to share ownership and leadership as well...it can't just be the administration, teachers must be leaders as well." Ultimately, when principals strive to include teachers in the leadership of the school, student achievement improves (Barth, 2001b; Davies, 2005).

In what way, if any, do educators perceive high-stakes accountability as being influential in decision making, curriculum selection, and school goals?

From the data findings, it can be concluded that data driven decision making, curriculum, and school goals are all directly impacted as a result from high-stakes testing. This reform is intertwined with many facets of education and none so much as data driven decision making. Though decisions in schools have been a constant, the implementation of data to support all decisions has changed the face of education. According to Valli and Buese (2007), data drives all decision making in a school setting. And King (2002) posited that there has been an expanded focus to include decision making when questions regarding student achievement arise. The findings showed that when presented with questions regarding decision making, the majority of educators, both teachers and principals, turned the conversation to data and its impact on student achievement. Principal Dunning attempted to provide insight to how decisions are made in his building. “...We try to make it [decisions] data-driven as much as possible and aligned and focused to everything we are doing.”

Within the framework of instructional leadership, Mangieri and Arnn (1985) identified the importance of curriculum. The educator participants were in agreement when discussing the pace of their curriculum. Yet, they had mixed experiences pertaining to the best way to rectify those curriculum issues. Whereas one participant stated, “...there’s not a freedom to make that choice if you feel like you want to try something different...” another educator questioned the struggle that she faced when she had to “prioritize” what skills or targets she was going to have to skim over because of time restraints. According to Kahlenberg (2008), it is best to adjust curriculum when necessary

so each student benefits from the amount of instruction that is needed to understand the concept. Yet, that is not reality for many of the study participants. Principal Dunning noted, “Whether it is from the federal, state, or local government, I think with accountability and expectations...we are looking at the standards making sure we are accountable for following through with those expectations.”

Finally, with regard to educational goals, the study participants profoundly agreed goal setting was a beneficial result of high-stakes testing. Though few could remember school or district goals prior to 2006, every person in the study related to the impact that goal setting had on their student’s achievement. One educator commented, “Now we have instructional goals and then we collect data, and data drives our decisions...what’s working and what’s not...what we have and what we should change.” The review of literature found that in an educational setting, the ultimate outcome of making and following through with a goal leads to increased student achievement (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001, p. 93). As studies have documented, individuals with clear, written goals are significantly more likely to succeed than those without clearly defined goals (Ferguson & Sheldon, 2010). One educator shared why she believed goal setting was advantageous. “It [goals] makes us better...to have focus...it drives our instruction.” Principal Kern summed up the benefits of goal setting:

Now they [goals] are very specific, to the degree where you do have data that supports it. You have measurable objectives that are connected to what you goal is, and then when you look at your plan, the plan is deep with how you’re going to meet that [goal].

What, if any, are some of the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing as perceived by principals and teachers?

When examining the unintended consequences of high-stakes accountability, each of the participants had an opinion as to which consequence was most significant. But after a further review of the data, the study findings discovered one overarching issue: *de-professionalism*. De-professionalism, the loss of autonomy, is characterized by “Teachers simply lose(ing) the power to influence their work” (Frostenson, 2015). One teacher participant explained, “...you just feel compelled that you have to get all of this done and all this in by this date because then they have a test.” Another simply replied, “We have lost our autonomy and influence over daily pace of instruction.”

In addition, the accountability of high-stakes reform has impacted the creativity of educators. What is perceived as great teaching is reliant upon the teacher’s judgment (Schul 2011). Furthermore, the lack of autonomy impedes a teacher’s collective freedom to influence and decide on practice at the local level (Frostenson, 2015). Among the participants, there was agreement that de-professionalism restricted the teacher’s creative power. One educator claimed:

Some of the best teaching was like off the cuff. In that moment of, “Oh this is how I can reach this kid,” but now if you’re on that data cycle, you’re thinking “Oh wait, that’s not how our team decided we can do this.” You can’t have those moments as much as you were able to do before.

While it is evident from the data that these teachers are more familiar with their students instructionally than anyone else, it could be argued as Schul (2011) did, that reforms with high stake accountability have stripped teachers of some of their professional judgment.

Conclusions Derived from the Findings

To understand the impact of high-stakes accountability and data-driven decision making, a qualitative research study was conducted. The study was performed within the natural setting of the participants at a particular point in time (Creswell, 2007). The

purpose of the research was not to prove or disprove a hypothesis, but instead provide a big picture while themes emerged (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003). Within the qualitative methodology, a multi-case study approach was used with the goal of retrieving an in-depth understanding of the impact of high-stakes accountability (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002) on teachers and principals. A number of bounded cases were analyzed to expand upon generalizations provided by the participants (Creswell; Merriam). Through the process of collecting data from a multitude of sources, including interviews, focus groups, and observations over a period of time, consistent themes emerged to provide the researcher a thick description (Creswell; Mertens, 2005). Accordingly, the following conclusions were derived from the findings of this study related to the impact of high-stakes accountability through the lens of instructional leadership.

Changing Culture

From the data findings, it can be concluded that the culture in schools was affected as a result of high-stakes accountability. Furthermore, it was determined that by increasing collaborative practices, focusing on goals, and understanding the use of student data, this culture change could benefit both student achievement and best practices. Reeves (2007, p. 93) purported, “Cultural change, although challenging and time-consuming, is not only possible but necessary.”

Delving through the data, it became apparent that both administrators and educators viewed collaboration as divided into a two-part timeline. In 2006, prior to the accountability of NCLB, the manner in which teachers and administrators collaborated was superficial at best. The culture was a secluded one and teachers were ultimately on their own when it came to developing curriculum and implementing best practices. There

were numerous accounts from the educator participants illustrating how isolation was daunting as they began their careers. Although participants acknowledged that they believed, at the time, they were collaborators, they have only begun to now realize how removed they actually were. The second half of the timeline examined the collaborative framework after 2006 when high-stakes accountability was in full force. Through the perceptions of the participants, this cultural shift led to effective collaboration. It was evident from interviews and focus groups the participants highly regarded the benefits of being part of a collective nature. While each building had its own culture, and each building addressed collaboration in its own way, the conclusion is there is no correct way to collaborate as long as classroom doors metaphorically are opened and stayed open. The traditional mindset prior to NCLB, evolved into teachers working together to combat the intended and unintended consequences of high-stakes accountability. In addition to planning time being used to analyze student learning, administrators began to use their teachers as leaders in a more shared leadership routine. Principal Harrington noted, “The leadership team will get you much further...if that leadership team is really focused on instructional leadership not just managing...” This collaborative process benefitted the teachers, the administrators, the building, and ultimately, student achievement.

In addition, according to the study findings, aggressive performance expectations were also changing the culture of the school setting. The threat of sanctions and the pace of the instruction, had led to a stressful situation for educators, with many of the administrator participants acknowledging their teachers were overwhelmed with the workload. In addition, it was further indicated that teachers were frustrated with the implementation of new initiatives before the previous initiatives were fully implemented

and evaluated. The combination of these stressors created the potential for a negative environment. Consequently, as an instructional leader, the administrators realized one of their major responsibilities was to support the teachers. “The greatest impediment to meaningful cultural change is the gap between what leaders say they value and what they actually do” (Reeves, 2006). Since the instructional leader is responsible for the culture and, according to these administrators studied, they must find a way to relieve the stressors resulting from the reform and create supports for their teachers.

Illustrated in Figure 1 is the relationship between collaboration prior to accountability sanctions and post accountability sanctions as well as the performance stressors teachers perceived due to the changing climate in a high-stakes accountability era.

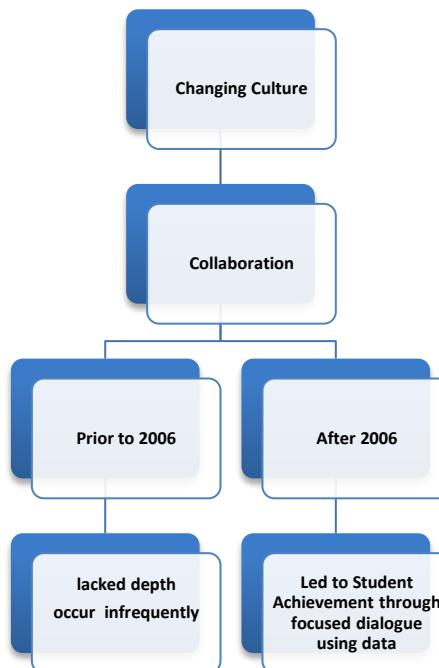


Figure 1: Represents the Changing Culture as a Result of High-Stakes Accountability

As noted by the lines, it is important to recognize that enhanced collaboration was an outcome of a changing culture, leading to a focus on student achievement. This was further illustrated by several participants who confirmed the changing culture. Now, with the expectation of teachers working together, the way teachers' supported students' learning in the classroom had impact on student achievement.

Changing Evidence

The theme of changing evidence, which was portrayed by data-driven decisions and purposeful goals, as noted by both teachers and principals, was directly implemented to increased student achievement. As indicated in the findings, administrators saw the value of the use of data, even as it transformed their roles because it turned what was once a subjective aspect of the job, student learning, into something that was quantifiable. The administrators within this study were in agreement that data analysis was quickly becoming a significant part of their jobs. However, the educator participants did not agree as wholeheartedly. Teachers perceived the data as time consuming and believed it distracted them from teaching the whole child. Although participants were of the opinion that data analysis was time consuming, it can be concluded that they understood the necessity for the evidence of growth. Van Barneveld (2008) noted there were benefits but raised the question whether it was worth the time taken from direct instruction.

From the perspectives of educators and administrators, the most significant component of changing evidence was the implementation of instructional goal setting. The characteristics of goal setting were a key component of student learning, and when the goal setting was intentional, change was evident. This was further illustrated by several participants who confirmed that goals drove improvement and performance as

well as being supported in the research (Ferguson & Sheldon, 2010). However, a caveat existed, because goal setting was only valuable if it was created with intentionality. It was the purposefulness that gave it endurance. Elucidated in Figure 2 is the connection between data-driven input and purposeful goals when supporting changing evidence.

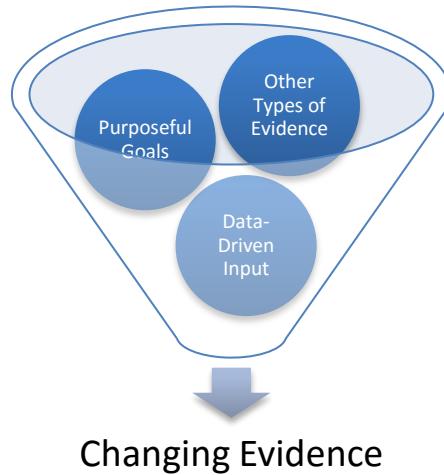


Figure 2: Represents the Many Facets of Changing Evidence

The funnel represents the data and the goals as two pieces of the many types of evidence required by high-stakes accountability. Together, these pieces molded into a changed culture. Therefore, it can be concluded from this research study that evidence such as data driven decision making coupled with focused goals are effective when used with intentionality.

Increased Rigor

When leading a school within a larger district, it is imperative that the curriculum is viable and guaranteed. This takes intentional planning and purposeful rigor to ensure equality across the district. In addition, increased rigor is a component of high-stakes accountability and is seen by some as the catalyst for all other accountability measures. Marzano and Toth (2014), explained:

Teachers need to plan for not only what students should understand and be able to do by the end of the learning cycle, they need to scaffold their instruction from facts and details to robust generalizations and processes in order to reach these rigorous standards (16).

It was evident from the interviews and focus groups the participants felt the accelerated pace and individualized instruction were paramount when it came to rigor. From the perspective of the educator participants, the accelerated pace of instruction has been a driving force in the rigor movement. One educator stated, “Students are experiencing anxiety and stress as a result of the high-stakes accountability.” The rigorous pace has led teachers to stay on track with the district’s pacing regardless of whether or not a child is ready to move on.

To counteract the rigorous pace, teachers embraced the idea of individualized instruction to facilitate student achievement. As mentioned throughout the research, individualized instruction was an improvement brought about as a direct result of high-stakes accountability. In essence, teachers favored employing such directives as it focused on the growth of their students. In addition, individualized instruction promoted teacher reflection as teachers needed to be aware of where each child was in the pace of learning.

Depicted in Figure 3 is the relationship between pace, individualized instruction, and increased rigor.

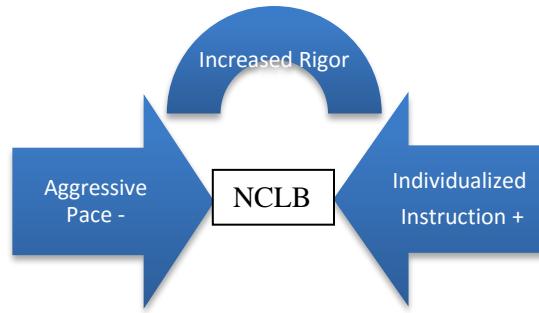


Figure 3: Represents the Role of Increased Rigor during High-Stakes Accountability

Increased rigor is illustrated to show that individualized instruction is viewed as productive and aggressive pace is viewed as counterproductive, however, both of them contributed to the rigor necessary to ensure student growth, as a result of NCLB.

Implications for Practice

The findings suggest that NCLB and the accompanying high stakes accountability had an impact on the role of administrators and teachers through the lens of instructional leadership. From this study, the researcher garnered future implications that can be applied to the practices of leadership within an elementary school setting.

One of the major components of the NCLB reform was schools needed to provide proof that students were learning. “Schools must report on the performance of different groups of students, such as racial minorities, as well as the student population as a whole. Students are expected to reach annual achievement targets, known as adequate yearly progress, or AYP” (Klein, 2016). As a result, data collection has been thoroughly explored by participants in the field. However, it was concluded that the administrator

participants and the educator participants were not in agreement to the process of data analysis and its use. An implication would be for teacher preparatory programs, along with teachers in the field, to gain a deeper perspective as to why data collection is necessary and from that, glean how it would benefit them in the classroom. Furthermore it is essential for the administrators to understand that adding data analysis to the teacher's responsibilities, requires that the administrators provide a myriad of supports for the teachers. Principals need to be well versed in understanding how to create time and resources for collaboration to occur for teachers. Time for reflection needs to be provided for disaggregating the data and implementing strategies based upon the findings, for all teachers both in vertical and horizontal planning periods.

Another subsequent implication for school leaders and teacher is training to provide skill sets that would help in choosing what is important and focusing on that enterprise until the participants are strong implementers of that change. As argued by Frunzi (2014, ¶2.), "...schools [that] focus on select, manageable change initiatives...increase the probability of achieving successful implementation of those initiatives". As a result, school district personnel need to refocus their efforts. "Concentrating the focus and effort of a school improvement plan on a few key initiatives is a manageable, effective approach for school improvement" (Frunzi, 2014, ¶4). Consequently, it is important for school leaders to understand which goals will have the greatest impact on student learning and support the teachers in the creation and implementation of those goals.

A final implication is addressing the needs of the students. All four buildings acknowledged that students were anxious and stressed. With the implementation of high-

stakes accountability, more and more pressure has been placed on the child to perform. A pediatrician in Jacksonville remarked on her dealings as a result of high-stakes testing, “We’ve seen increased anxiety over the past five to eight years,” she said. “I mean, it’s just incredible” (Thompson, 2014, ¶16).

It would be in the best interest of the child and the goal of raising student achievement if we slowed the pace of instruction, gave students opportunities for deep exploration of subjects, and recognized that students learn at different rates. As the sanctions are lifting, school leaders need to revisit the concept of viewing the whole child, and build the school culture around the learner versus building the learner around the school.

Recommendations for Future Study

The result of this study was to add to the body of knowledge that already exists concerning high-stakes accountability, data-driven decision making, and instructional leadership. As indicated in the literature review, though there is an abundance of information on accountability (Firestone, 2009; Guthrie & Springer, 2004; Hansen, Gentry, & Dalley, 2003), data-driven research (Bedwell, 2004; Firestone, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas, 2005) and instructional leadership (Blase & Blase, 1999; Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas; O’Donnell & White, 2005; Reitzug, 1997), there is still little research concerning whether or not high-stakes testing has influenced the actions and behavior of principal and teachers. O’Donnell and White (2005) noted, “...although numerous studies have investigated the relationship between the instructional leadership behaviors of principals and student achievement, most have not been conducted in an environment as politically driven as the current assessment-based educational system” (p.

2). Thus, the opportunity for a variety of research studies exist to bring awareness and understanding to the impact that high-stakes accountability has had on the practitioner. From this research study, three recommendations for future research are suggested and provided within this section.

With the 2015 reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (*ESEA*) and the subsequent abatement of *NCLB*, the sanctions of high-stakes accountability will no longer be a threat. An initial recommendation for future research would be conducting a similar study but add new research pertaining to this release of sanctions and the addition of initiatives such as *Common Core State Standards* (*CCSS*) and the *Every Child Achieves Act* (*ECAA*). NEA President, Lily Eskelsen Garcia, commented, “the ECAA is not a perfect bill...it represents a historic opportunity to overhaul its broken and universally unpopular predecessor” (Walker, 2015). As this study revealed, *NCLB* and the sanctions it imposed were the catalyst for a negative school climate. Further research would be beneficial by viewing the perceptions of educators that had not been impacted as a result of the high-stakes accountability era.

A secondary recommendation for further research would be conducting a similar study in an urban core or rural setting versus the suburban setting of this study. The research would be conducted using the same instructional leadership lens as it investigated high-stakes accountability. As the *NCLB* reform was directly aimed at subgroups (minorities and children in poverty), the data gleaned would be rich and thick.

A final recommendation would be to replicate the study at different grade levels. Middle and high schools have also participated in yearly high-stakes testing. Additionally, high schools are subjected to national assessments to prove college

readiness. As students at these grade levels have already become accustomed to high-stakes testing prior to their arrival, the data derived from administrators and educators might possess a varied viewpoint. There is minimal research pertaining to the impact middle and high schools face as a result of educational reform. Any research in this area would add to the body of knowledge. Therefore, these investigations could add to the body of knowledge that exists relating the impact that high-stakes accountability has on instructional leadership and data-driven decision making.

Concluding Overview

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of high-stakes accountability on instructional leadership and data-driven decision making. Through a qualitative, multi-case study, the educators and administrators were analyzed using the conceptual framework of the instructional leadership theory. Within the findings of this study, it was suggested that a change in collaborative culture, implementing ways to prove student's growth, and providing individualized instruction for children were areas in which school district could focus initiatives. Although unintentional data, too many initiatives, and an aggressive instructional pace, were determined to have adverse results, it was also indicated that goal setting and seeing the child as a whole was necessary in achieving student growth. The data also revealed that the implementation of collaboration resulted in a shared leadership environment which ultimately led to student learning. The findings further indicated administrators and educators saw the impact of educational reform as a challenge, but they worked through it and came out successful. As Principal Harrington concluded:

...we kept saying about 2014, 100%? That year came and went and we just said, "That's unrealistic, that's not going to happen." But I think we got a lot closer than we ever thought we would have...we are better as a result of NCLB.

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Appendix A

Permission Forms/Informed Consent

1. District Gatekeeper Permission for School District Participation Letter
2. District Gatekeeper for Administrator and Educator Participation
3. Principal Permission for Educator Participation Letter
4. Principal Permission for Educator Participation
5. Letter of Informed Consent: Principal Participant
6. Informed Consent Form – Principal Participant
7. Letter of Informed Consent: Educator Participant
8. Informed Consent Form – Educator Participant

District Gatekeeper Permission for School District Participation Letter

Dear <Title> <First Name> <Last Name>:

I would like to please request your permission to invite applicable administrators and faculty in the <Name of District> to participate in a doctoral research study, entitled: *The Impact of High Stakes Accountability on Instructional Leadership and Data-driven Decision-Making*. My intention is examine the perceptions of elementary principals and faculty concerning their thoughts on the issue of high-stakes accountability and its impact upon instruction. Information gathered during data collection should be beneficial for elementary principal and teacher leaders as they to examine the changing role of educational leaders due to reform initiatives. The study fulfills the research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

For this research study, I am in search of principals and teachers that were educators prior to the 2006 implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. In addition, I am seeking those educators that are considered “instructional leaders.” I am requesting that you recommend two principals within your district that you recognize as instructional leaders and have been principals for over eight years. I am seeking your permission, as the superintendent of the <Name of School District>, to contact these principals, and ultimately their faculty, for the purpose of inviting them to participate in this study. A copy of the interview protocol, consent letter, and informed consent forms are attached for your review.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. The participant may withdraw at any time without penalty, including in the middle of interviews or after it is completed. Participants’ answers will be confidential and remain anonymous in the reporting of results. The participant, school and school district will not be listed in my dissertation or any future study publications.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns about granting permission either by phone at (816) 286-9916 or by electronic mail at kris.schuler@comcast.net. In addition, you are also welcome to contact the dissertation advisor for this research study, Dr. Barbara Martin at (660) 543-8823 or by electronic mail at bmartin@ucmo.edu.

If you choose to allow me to contact administrators and faculty at your institution regarding participation in this study, please complete the attached permission form. A copy of this letter and your written consent will be provided to you for your records.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

Kristina K. Schuler
Doctoral Candidate
University of Missouri - Columbia

District Gatekeeper for Administrator and Educator Participation

I, _____, grant permission for the <Building Name> School in the <School District Name> to be contacted in order to identify administrators, and faculty willing to participate in the research study, entitled: *The Impact of High-stakes Accountability on Instructional Leadership and Data-driven Decision-Making*. This study is being conducted by Kristina K. Schuler, a doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

By signing this permission form, I understand that the following safeguards are in place to ensure protection of the participants:

1. All participation is completely voluntary and a participant may withdraw at any time throughout any phase of the research study.
2. All responses will be used for dissertation research and for potential future journal publications.
3. All identities and affiliations will be kept confidential in all phases of the research study.
4. A researcher will conduct one (1) on-site interview (administrator) and one (1) on-site focus group (faculty) per building. Two (2) buildings will be chosen within the district. The interviews and the focus groups each will take no more than one (1) hour to complete.

Please keep a copy of this permission form and permission letter for your records. If you choose to grant permission for your educators to participate in this study, please complete this *Administrative Permission for Administrator and Educator Participation* and fax it to: Kristina K. Schuler at 816-286-9916 or by electronic mail at kris.schuler@comcast.net as soon as possible.

I have read the material above and I have had the opportunity to ask questions and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I grant permission for <School Name> faculty to be contacted and invited to participate in this study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Title/Position: _____

School District: _____

Please return to: Kristina K. Schuler • 1008 Wesley Ave., Raymore, Missouri 64083
Cell Phone: 816-286-9916 • Fax: 816-892-1751 • Email: kris.schuler@comcast.net

Principal Permission for Educator Participation Letter
<Name of School>

Dear <Title> <First Name> <Last Name> :

I would like to request your permission to invite <Name of Participant> to participate in a doctoral research study entitled: *The Impact of High-stakes Accountability on Instructional Leadership and Data-driven Decision-Making*. My intention is to examine the perceptions of teacher leaders concerning the impact high-stakes accountability and data-driven decision-making has had on instructional leadership. Information gathered during data collection should be beneficial for K-12 educational leaders as they examine the changing role of educational leaders due to reform initiatives. This study fulfills my dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia. For this research study, I am in search of teachers that were educators prior to the 2006 implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. In addition, I am seeking those educators that are considered “instructional leaders.” I am requesting that you recommend a group of teachers within your building that you recognize as instructional leaders, have been elementary educators for at least eight years, and would be willing to participate in this focus group. I am seeking your permission as the principal of the <Name of Building> to contact these teachers for the purpose of inviting them to participate in this focus group. A copy of the interview protocol, consent letter, and informed consent forms are attached for your review.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. The participant may withdraw at any time without penalty, including in the middle of the focus group or after it is completed. Participants’ answers will be confidential and remain anonymous in the reporting of results. The participant, school and school district will not be listed in my dissertation or any future study publications.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns about granting permission either by phone at (816) 286-9916 or by electronic mail at kris.schuler@comcast.net. In addition, you are also welcome to contact the dissertation advisor for this research study, Dr. Barbara Martin at (660) 543-8823 or by electronic mail at bmartin@ucmo.edu.

If you choose to allow me to contact administrators and faculty at your institution regarding participation in this study, please complete the attached permission form. A copy of this letter and your written consent will be provided to you for your records.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

Kristina K. Schuler
Doctoral Candidate
University of Missouri - Columbia

Principal Permission for Educator Participation

I, _____, grant permission for <Participant Name> to be contacted and interviewed at <School Name> in order to participate in the research study entitled: *The Impact of High-stakes Accountability on Instructional Leadership and Data-driven Decision-Making*. The study is being conducted by Kristina K. Schuler, a doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

By signing this permission form, I understand that the following safeguards are in place to ensure protection of the educator choosing to participate in the study:

1. All participation is completely voluntary and a participant may withdraw at any time throughout any phase of the research study.
2. All responses will be used for dissertation research and for potential future journal publications.
3. All identities and affiliations will be kept confidential in all phases of the research study.
4. A researcher will conduct one (1) on-site focus group which will take no more than one (1) hour to complete.

Please keep a copy of this permission form and permission letter for your records. If you choose to grant permission for your educators to participate in this study, please complete this *Principal Permission for Educator Participation* and fax it to: Kristina K. Schuler at 816-286-9916 or by electronic mail at kris.schuler@comcast.net as soon as possible.

I have read the material above and I have had the opportunity to ask questions and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I grant permission for <School Name> faculty to be contacted and invited to participate in this study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Title/Position: _____

School District: _____

Please return to: Kristina K. Schuler • 1008 Wesley Ave., Raymore, Missouri 64083
Cell Phone: 816-286-9916 • Fax: 816-892-1751 • Email: kris.schuler@comcast.net

Letter of Informed Consent: Principal Participant

Dear Participant,

I would like to extend to you a personal invitation to participate in a research study, entitled *The Impact of High-stakes Accountability on Instructional Leadership and Data-driven Decision-Making*. The study is a requirement of the dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia. You have been invited to participate in this research study because you are an effective administrator that worked as a principal prior to the *No Child Left Behind Act* and you have been identified by the superintendent of your district as an instructional leader.

Researcher: Ms. Kristina K. Schuler, University of Missouri, Doctoral Candidate, please contact the researcher by email at kris.schuler@comcast.net or by phone at 816-286-9916.

Dissertation Supervisor: Dr. Barbara Martin, University of Central Missouri, please contact Dr. Martin by phone at 816-543-8823, or at bmartin@ucmo.edu

Institutional Review Board: University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board, 483 McReynolds, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211. If you have questions regarding your right as a research participant please contact the Campus IRB at 573-882-9585.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine how high-stakes accountability testing has influenced the role of the instructional leader.

The research questions guiding this study are:

- 1) How has the issue of accountability, as framed by *NCLB*, impacted the role of elementary principals as instructional leaders?
- 2) How has the issue of accountability, as framed by *NCLB*, impacted the role of teachers as instructional leaders?
- 3) In what way, if any, do educators perceive high-stakes accountability as being influential in decision making, curriculum selection, and school goals?
- 4) What, if any, are some of the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing as perceived by principals and teachers?

Procedures: If you give your consent to participate in this study, the researcher will conduct a forty-five (45) to sixty (60) minute interview on your campus, in a designated room or office. The interview will be audio. The questions will be semi-structured with the opportunity to provide open-ended answers. In the event significant new findings develop during the course of the study, the researcher may ask you to participate in additional audio-recorded interviews either in person or via telephone. In addition to being recorded, all interviews will be transcribed verbatim for use by the researcher. The researcher may also ask additional questions of you via electronic mail. All participants will be allowed to review the transcripts to ensure accuracy.

Participation: Participation in this research study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. If there are any questions regarding participation feel free to contact the researcher at (186) 286-9916 or by e-mail at kris.schuler@comcast.net. You may also

contact my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Barbara Martin, at (660) 543-8823 or by e-mail at bmartin@ucmo.edu.

Risks: As you have a choice as to which interview items to answer, you are ensured that there is no identifiable risk for you that is greater than those encountered in your everyday life.

Benefits: Participation in this research study will add to the body of knowledge available concerning high-stakes accountability and instructional leadership.

Confidentiality: As an interview participant, your name and answers will remain confidential; only my dissertation supervisor and I will have access to identifiable data. Research collected will be coded for qualitative analysis and summarized for reporting. Your anonymity and confidentiality will be protected in any published results.

Consent: To participate in this study, please sign the attached consent form indicating you understand and agree to participate in the study. A copy of this form will be provided to you for your records.

Sincerely,

Kristina K. Schuler
Doctoral Candidate
University of Missouri

Informed Consent Form: Principal Participant

I, _____, agree to participate in the study: *The Impact of High-stakes Accountability on Instructional Leadership and Data-driven Decision-Making* conducted by Kristina K. Schuler, doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri-Columbia. I understand the following:

- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions prior to the research study and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- My responses during the research study will be used for the dissertation and future potential publications regarding this subject.
- My participation in the study is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty, including in the middle of interviews or after it is completed.
- My identity and affiliation will be kept confidential in all phases of the research, including any future publications of this study.
- My consent to participate or refusal to participate will not affect employment in any way.
- I understand this is a minimal risk study.

Please keep a copy of the consent letter and a signed copy of the consent form for your records. If you choose to participate in this study, please complete the attached signed consent form and return it to Kristina K. Schuler by fax at (816) 892-1751 or by electronic mail at kris.schuler@comcast.net as soon as possible. Please be sure to include contact information so interview plans can be made and communicated to you. If you have any questions, please contact the researcher.

I have read the information above and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Title/Position: _____

School District: _____

Contact Information:

Phone: _____ (Circle One: Work, Home, Cell)

Best Time to Contact: _____

E-mail: _____

Please return to: Kristina K. Schuler • 1008 Wesley Ave., Raymore, Missouri 64083
Cell Phone: 816-286-9916 • Fax: 816-892-1751 • Email: kris.schuler@comcast.net

Letter of Informed Consent: Educator Participant

Dear Participant,

As part of my dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri – Columbia, I would like to extend a personal invitation to you to participate in a research study entitled: *The Impact of High-stakes Accountability on Instructional Leadership and Data-driven Decision-Making*. The focus of this study is how instructional leadership has changed as a result of high-stakes accountability and data-driven decision-making initiative. As a teacher leader, your point of view is vital to the research.

Researcher: Ms. Kristina K. Schuler, University of Missouri, Doctoral Candidate, please contact the researcher by email at kris.schuler@comcast.net or by phone at 816-286-9916.

Dissertation Supervisor: Dr. Barbara Martin, University of Central Missouri, please contact Dr. Martin by phone at 816-543-8823 or at bmartin@ucmo.edu

Institutional Review Board: University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board, 483 McReynolds, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211. If you have questions regarding your right as a research participant please contact the Campus IRB at 573-882-9585.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine how high-stakes accountability testing has influenced the role of the instructional leader.

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How has the issue of accountability, as framed by *NCLB*, impacted the role of elementary principals as instructional leaders?
2. How has the issue of accountability, as framed by *NCLB*, impacted the role of teachers as instructional leaders?
3. In what way, if any, do educators perceive high-stakes accountability as being influential in decision making, curriculum selection, and school goals?
4. What, if any, are some of the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing as perceived by principals and teachers?

Procedures: If you give your consent to participate in this study, the researcher will conduct a forty-five (45) minute to one (1) hour focus group on your campus, in a designated room or office. The focus group will be audio and video-taped. The questions will be semi-structured with the opportunity to provide open-ended answers. In addition to being recorded, all interviews will be transcribed verbatim for use by the researcher. All participants will be allowed to review the transcripts to ensure accuracy.

Participation: Participation in this research study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. If there are any questions regarding participation feel free to contact the researcher at (186) 286-9916 or by e-mail at kris.schuler@comcast.net. You may also contact the dissertation supervisor, Dr. Barbara Martin, at (660) 543-8823 or by e-mail at bmartin@ucmo.edu.

Risks: As you have a choice as to which interview items to answer, you are ensured that there is no identifiable risk for you that is greater than those encountered in your everyday life.

Benefits: Participation in this research study will add to the body of knowledge available concerning high-stakes accountability and instructional leadership.

Confidentiality: As an interview participant, your name and answers will remain confidential; only my dissertation supervisor and I will have access to identifiable data. Research collected will be coded for qualitative analysis and summarized for reporting. Your anonymity and confidentiality will be protected in any published results.

Consent: To participate in this study, please sign the attached consent form indicating you understand and agree to participate in the study. A copy of this form will be provided to you for your records.

Sincerely,

Kristina K. Schuler
Doctoral Candidate
University of Missouri

Informed Consent Form: Educator Participant

I, _____, agree to participate in the study: *The Impact of High-stakes Accountability on Instructional Leadership and Data-driven Decision-Making* conducted by Kristina K. Schuler, doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri-Columbia. I understand the following:

- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions prior to the research study and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- My responses during the research study will be used for the dissertation and future potential publications regarding this subject.
- My participation in the study is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty, including in the middle of interviews or after it is completed.
- My identity and affiliation will be kept confidential in all phases of the research, including any future publications of this study.
- My consent to participate or refusal to participate will not affect employment in any way.
- I understand this is a minimal risk study.

Please keep a copy of the consent letter and a signed copy of the consent form for your records. If you choose to participate in this study, please complete the attached signed consent form and return it to Kristina K. Schuler by fax at (816) 892-1751 or by electronic mail at kris.schuler@comcast.net as soon as possible. Please be sure to include contact information so interview plans can be made and communicated to you. If you have any questions, please contact the researcher.

I have read the information above and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Title/Position: _____

School District: _____

Contact Information:

Phone: _____ (Circle One: Work, Home, Cell)

Best Time to Contact: _____

E-mail: _____

Please return to: Kristina K. Schuler • 1008 Wesley Ave., Raymore, Missouri 64083
Cell Phone: 816-286-9916 • Fax: 816-892-1751 • Email: kris.schuler@comcast.net

Appendix B

University of Missouri – Columbia Campus Institutional Review Board Approval



Institutional Review Board
University of Missouri-Columbia

190 Galena Hall; Dc074.00
Columbia, MO 65212
573-882-3181
irb@missouri.edu

December 31, 2015

Principal Investigator: Kristina K Schuler, EdD
Department: ELPA

Your Exempt Application to project entitled The Impact of High-Stakes Accountability on Instructional Leadership and Data Driven Decision-Making was reviewed and approved by the MU Institutional Review Board according to terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2003344
IRB Review Number	207159
Initial Application Approval Date	December 31, 2015
IRB Expiration Date	December 31, 2016
Level of Review	Exempt
Exempt Categories	45 CFR 46.101b(2)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk
Internal Funding	Personal funds

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
2. All unanticipated problems, adverse events, and deviations must be reported to the IRB within 5 days.
3. All changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce immediate risk.
4. All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.
5. The Annual Exempt Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date. If the study is complete, the Completion/Withdrawal Form may be submitted in lieu of the Annual Exempt Form.
6. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.
7. Utilize all approved research documents located within the attached files section of eCompliance. These documents are highlighted green.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB at 573-882-3181 or irb@missouri.edu.

Thank you,
MU Institutional Review Board

Appendix C

Explanation of Instructional Leadership Terms for Interview

Explanation of Instructional Leadership Terms for Interview

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research study, entitled: *The Impact of High-stakes Accountability on Instructional Leadership and Data-driven Decision-Making*. To aid in the interview process, I have provided an explanation of instructional leadership characteristics. It is my intention that this explanation will present a framework of understanding that will be of assistance during the interview process.

The innumerable roles associated with the instructional leader helps create the true understanding of its definition. These educators can be found:

- 1) supervising curriculum
- 2) providing professional development
- 3) gaining funds and resources for improved instruction
- 4) establishing comprehensible goals through a mission and vision
- 5) creating a positive culture with the staff and the community
- 6) supporting collaboration
- 7) aiding peers through BEST practices

all with the intent of improving student outcomes (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Flath, 1989; Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger, 2005; NAESP, 2001; Portin & Shen, 1998).

In this era of reform, principals were now being held accountable, alongside teachers, for instructional improvement (Firestone & Riehl, 2005; Lugg, Bulkley, Firestone, & Garner, 2002; Mangin, 2007).

Consequently, instructional leadership should be profoundly entrenched in the role of the principal (Sergiovanni, 2006) and as such, Smith and Andrews (1989) collected four areas of strategic interaction that an instructional leader should implement:

1) curricular resource

- provides professional development for teachers
- keeps up with the latest trends
- overseeing new curriculum implementation

2) instructional mentor

- provide teachers with skills that improve instruction
- show the expertise of the principal
- model learning

3) communicator

- provides teachers with a mission
- provides teachers with a vision
- relates mission and vision to school effectiveness

4) visible presence

- be available for teacher's support
- consistently walk through classrooms

Thank you,

Kristina K. Schuler
Doctoral Student
University of Missouri

Appendix D

Interview and Focus Group Protocols

1. Principal Interview Protocol
2. Educator Focus Group Protocol

Principal Interview Protocol

Participating Administrator: _____

Date: _____

Beginning Time: _____ Ending Time: _____

Location: _____

Introduction:

Good afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to answer my questions focusing on your perceptions and experiences as a building principal. My name is Kristina Schuler and I will be conducting the interview. I truly appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule in order to visit with me today. In order to ensure accuracy, I will be audio taping the interview.

I am curious to know more about your experiences with instructional leadership and high-stakes testing and I am approaching this interview as a conversation between professionals. If you want to follow-up on a question or give an example, feel free to do so. Remember, there is no right or wrong answer. If needed, please refer to the instructional leadership definition letter provided. Our session will last about 45-60 minutes and we will not be taking a formal break. Please let me know if you need to leave the table for any reason. Let's begin by finding out more about each other.

Questions	Research Question(s)
-----------	----------------------

Opening Questions: 2 min

1. Tell me your name and your position within the district. 2. How long have you been a principal?	Learn about participant
---	-------------------------

Introductory Question: 5 min.

3. Tell me about your principalship experiences over the years. <i>Probe: Describe your role prior to 2006.</i> <i>Probe: Describe your role since 2006.</i> <i>Probe: How has the role of the principal changed over the last <insert number of years as a principal> years?</i>	Q1 Q1 Q1 Q1
--	--------------------------

Transition Question: 5 min.

<p>4. Prior to 2006, what characteristics did you possess to consider yourself an instructional leader?</p> <p><i>Probe: If you did not consider yourself an instructional leader, what characteristics were you lacking?</i></p> <p>5. Since 2006, how have you changed or maintained these characteristics?</p>	Q1 Q1 Q1
---	----------------

Key Questions: 10 min.

<p>6. When considering instructional leadership characteristics, how has the implementation of high-stakes accountability (such as the <i>No Child Left Behind Act</i>) changed your role as a principal?</p> <p><i>Probe: Share any examples you have concerning your role as a curricular resource.</i></p> <p><i>Probe: Share any examples you have concerning your role as an instructional mentor.</i></p> <p><i>Probe: Share any examples you have concerning your role as a communicator.</i></p> <p><i>Probe: Share any examples you have concerning your role as a viable presence.</i></p> <p>7. How do you perceive these positive and negative changes?</p>	Q1 Q1 Q1 Q1 Q1 Q1
---	----------------------------------

Key Questions: 10 min.

<p>8. How influential are the requirements of the <i>No Child Left Behind Act</i> on your decision making process?</p> <p><i>Probe: Describe some decisions that might have been impacted as a result of high-stakes accountability. Were these decisions based upon data collected?</i></p> <p>9. How influential are the requirements of the <i>No Child Left Behind Act</i> on your curriculum selections?</p> <p><i>Probe: Describe facets of curriculum (including engagement, resources, and instructional strategies) that might have been impacted as a result of high-stakes accountability.</i></p>	Q3 Q3 Q3 Q3
---	----------------------

10. How influential are the requirements of the <i>No Child Left Behind Act</i> upon your implementation of school goals?	Q3
<i>Probe: Compare examples of goals your organization might have had prior to 2006 with goals your organization currently has.</i>	Q3
<i>Probe: How do you perceive changing goals in a school setting?</i>	Q3

Key Question: 5 min.

11. Describe any unintended consequences, both positive and negative, that are a result of high-stakes accountability.	Q4
<i>Probe: How have these consequences altered your role as a principal?</i>	Q1, Q4

Ending Question: 5 min

11. Is there anything else you would wish to tell me that I have not asked?	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4
---	----------------

Thank you for your time today. I will be sending a copy of the transcription to you via email. If you have any corrections or changes, at that time, please let me know. Again, this interview will be confidential and you and your building will not be identified in the research or further publications.

Teacher Focus Group Protocol

Participating Faculty: _____

Date: _____

Beginning Time: _____ Ending Time: _____

Location: _____

Introduction:

Good afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to answer my questions focusing on your perceptions and experiences as teacher leaders. My name is Kristina Schuler and I will be conducting the focus group. I truly appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule in order to visit with me today. In order to ensure accuracy, I will be audio and video taping the interview.

I am curious to know more about your experiences with instructional leadership and high-stakes testing and I am approaching this interview as a conversation between professionals. If you want to follow-up on a question or give an example, feel free to do so. Remember, there is no right or wrong answer. Our session will last about 45-60 minutes and we will not be taking a formal break. Please let me know if you need to leave the table for any reason. Let's begin by finding out more about each other.

Questions	Research Question(s)
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Opening Questions: 2-3 min.

<p>1. Please tell me your name and your position with the school.</p> <p><i>Probe: How long have you been teaching elementary school?</i></p> <p><i>Probe: How long have you been in your current position?</i></p>	<p>Learn about participant</p>
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Introductory Question: 5 min.

<p>2. Tell me about your experience as a teacher over the years.</p> <p><i>Probe: Describe your role prior to 2006.</i></p> <p><i>Probe: Describe your role since 2006.</i></p> <p><i>Probe: How has the role of the teacher changed over the last <insert number of years as a teacher> years?</i></p>	<p>Q2</p> <p>Q2</p> <p>Q2</p> <p>Q2</p>
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Transition Question: 5 min.

3. What characteristics do you believe an instructional leader needs to possess? <i>Probe: Describe a principal that you have worked with that you considered an instructional leader.</i>	Q2
4. What characteristics do you believe a teacher leader needs to possess? <i>Probe: Describe a teacher that you have worked with that you considered a teacher leader.</i>	Q2
5. How are the characteristics of a teacher leader and instructional leader similar and different?	Q2

Key Questions: 10 min.

6. When considering what it takes to be a teacher leader, how has the implementation of high-stakes accountability (such as the <i>No Child Left Behind Act</i>) changed your role as a teacher? 7. How do you perceive these positive and negative changes?	Q2 Q2
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Key Questions: 10 min.

8. How influential are the requirements of the <i>No Child Left Behind Act</i> on your decision making process? <i>Probe: Describe some decisions that might have been impacted as a result of high-stakes accountability.</i> <i>Probe: Were these decisions based upon data collected?</i>	Q3
8. How influential are the requirements of the <i>No Child Left Behind Act</i> on your curriculum selections? <i>Probe: Describe facets of curriculum (including engagement, resources, and instructional strategies) that might have been impacted as a result of high-stakes accountability.</i>	Q3
9. How influential are the requirements of the <i>No Child Left Behind Act</i> upon your implementation of school goals? <i>Probe: Compare examples of goals your organization might have had prior to 2006 with goals your organization currently has.</i>	Q3

<i>Probe: How do you perceive changing goals in a school setting?</i>	Q3
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Key Question: 5 min.

10. Describe any unintended consequences, both positive and negative, that are a result of high-stakes accountability. <i>Probe: How have these consequences altered your role as a teacher?</i>	Q4 Q2, Q4
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Ending Question: 5 min.

11. Is there anything else you would wish to tell me that I have not asked?	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4
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Thank you for your time today. I will be sending a copy of the transcription to you via email. If you have any corrections or changes, at that time, please let me know. Again, this interview will be confidential and you and your building will not be identified in the research or further publications.

Appendix E

Interview Observation Form

Interview Observation Form

Date: _____

Participant(s): _____

Beginning Time: _____ Ending Time: _____

Location: _____

Observations:

Appendix F

On-Site Observation Form

On-Site Observation Form

Date: _____

Participant(s): _____

Beginning Time: _____ Ending Time: _____

Location: _____

Observations:

Appendix G

Review of Document Form

Review of Document Form

Date: _____

Name of Document: _____

Type of Document: _____

Origin Date of Document: _____

Received From: _____

Location: _____

Document Coding Number: _____

Notes:

Appendix H

Predetermined Coding for Participants and Observations

- 1) Principal 1 (P1)
- 2) Principal 2 (P2)
- 3) Principal 3 (P3)
- 4) Principal 4 (P4)
- 5) Educator 1 (E1)
- 6) Educator 2 (E2)
- 7) Educator 3 (E3)
- 8) Educator 4 (E4)
- 9) Educator 5 (E5)
- 10) Educator 6 (E6)
- 11) Educator 7 (E7)
- 12) Educator 8 (E8)
- 13) Educator 9 (E9)
- 14) Educator 10 (E10)
- 15) Educator 11 (E11)
- 16) Educator 12 (E12)
- 17) Educator 13 (E13)
- 18) Educator 14 (E14)
- 19) Educator 15 (E15)
- 20) Educator 16 (E16)
- 21) Educator 17 (E17)
- 22) Educator 18 (E18)
- 23) Educator 19 (E19)
- 24) Educator 20 (E20)

25) Educator 21 (E21)

26) Educator 22 (E22)

VITA

Kristina Kraas Schuler was born in Grandview, Missouri to Alvin and Edith Kraas. She graduated in 1984 from Grandview Senior High School in Grandview, Missouri. In 1990, she received her Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education from Central Missouri State University in Warrensburg, Missouri. Additionally, she earned her Master's of Arts degree in Curriculum and Instruction from the Baker University in Baldwin City, Kansas. Later, she received a Specialist's degree in Curriculum Leadership from William Woods University in Fulton, Missouri followed by a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri – Columbia in 2016.

Kris' work experiences have been dedicated to educating elementary children. Kris has formerly held positions as a Director of an Extended Care Program and a primary educator. For the past 19 years, Kris has taught 6th grade with a short break as an Instructional Coach in the Raymore-Peculiar School District. Kris was acknowledged as the Raymore-Peculiar Teacher of the Year in 2014. Her research interests include: mentoring new teachers, brain-based learning, and best practices. Dr. Schuler currently resides in Raymore, Missouri, with her husband, Kurt Schuler and her children, Korey, Kaleb, and Kate Schuler.